

Draining the Amazon's Swamp

Patrick McEvoy-Halston

Copyright © 2017 Patrick McEvoy-Halston

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9781521074886

DEDICATION

To the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
Having Your Beefcake, and Leaving Him Too	1
The Search for a Way of Being	36
Pleasure into Pain, Pain into Pleasure	47
Draining the Amazons' Swamp	112
Jo's March	132
Critical Movements	156
Haunting Raveloe	172
Introductions and Initiations	185
Poet as Physician	189
Leaving Home	193
From Humble(d) Beginnings	196
Alexander the Large	203
Greedy for Your Hurt	207
Marcher's Merger	216
Privileging Marlow	233
Sinister Advances and Sweet Returns	245
The Other Crowd	255
Adam's Presumptuous, Adventurous	260
Not Meat	267
Securing Their Worth	273

PATRICK MCEVOY-HALSTON

Socrates and his God	282
Lie about everything under the sun	286
“Mi Casa, Su Casa”	288
Splendid Isolation and Cruel Returns	299
The Devil Made Me Enjoy it	314
Worthy Companions	330
The Visible Invisible Man	344
Useful Object	358
Maintaining the Peace	366
Getting Noticed	371
Critical Introduction	381
A Good Place for a Pump and a Dump	386
Consolidating Gains	396
Quitting Home	426
Matricide in the City	452
Grabbing Hold, for Departure’s Sake	466
Moderns and their Mothers’ Reach	478
How Insensitive!	501
The Good Fight	516
Soothing Satire	535

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the great professors at the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto, that inspired me to put into the world, essays the world would have to reckon with.

Having Your Beefcake, and Leaving Him Too (Oct. 2001)

Aphra Behn's desire for intimacy and sex with an admiring (and admirable) young man is the foremost inspiration for her creating "The Disappointment" and *Oroonoko*. Claims that either work is primarily concerned with other things testifies largely to Behn's success in misdirecting readers: a goal as vital to her own self-protection as is her success in misdirecting herself into thinking she is in fact writing about and attempting to satisfy something other than her own "suspect" desires. That her desire for sexual intimacy is so real and so pressing to be the reason *why* these works were written, as well as the key factor in determining *how*, exactly, Behn wrote them, will hopefully be demonstrated in this essay. That admitting this desire to herself is so dangerous a thing to do because sexual satisfaction is so suspect a desire for an older woman to admit, develop, and enjoy in eighteenth-century society—even if only through her own writings—so as to make this paper seem a work of scientific detection intent on uncovering her base nature, will be

demonstrated beginning with the uncovering of a lie, or a lie-seeming misdirection, Behn tells us in “The Disappointment.”

In “The Disappointment” Behn writes, “The nymph’s resentments none but I / Can well imagine or condole. But none can guess Lysander’s soul, / But those who swayed his destiny” (131-34). This, I believe, is authorial misdirection—for it is precisely Behn who “sways” poor Lysander’s destiny: she is the writer, poor Lysander but her hapless prop. *Behn* is the “env[y]ing god [who] conspires / To snatch his power, yet leave[s] him the desire!” (79-80). *She* knows what it is to lack “Nature’s support [. . .] / Itself now wants the art to live” (81-83). Like Lysander, she lacks “nature’s support”: though she desires consummated love, her age makes this ridiculous. It is therefore *her own* “bewitching influence” (139) that dooms Lysander “to the hell of impotence” (140). Why? Because she has discovered a stratagem for bringing sexual intimacy into her life without thereby inviting upon herself a “vast pleasure [. . .] which too much love destroys” (73-74): a “vast pleasure turned to pain” (73).

Lysander’s “destiny” is no accident: he *must* suffer so the nymph doesn’t have to. The nymph, described as “Abandoned by her pride and shame, / She does her softest joys dispense, / Offering her virgin innocence / A victim to love’s sacred flame” (65-68), is the same nymph who leaves Lysander “fainting on the gloomy bed” (120) with “No print upon the grassy road [. . .] / to instruct pursuing eyes” (124). The virgin whose innocence would have been lost, changing

her nature forever, leaves the poetic world an eternal mythic Daphne, leaving the reader alone with Lysander, with his grief swelling into storms, with him cursing his birth, fate, and stars. He alone is left to experience shame. Yet despite the fact that his shame owes to his *inability* to consummate his lust, and despite the likelihood we leave the poem thinking its title well caught its gist, this testifies more to Behn’s art at misdirection than to an absence of ambiguity in the poem: for the verses we read of Cloris before and after his inability to perform are just as appropriate for usage if he actually *had* done the deed. Imagine if after finally “Offering her virgin innocence” (67), Lysander performed, wouldn’t having her return from a trance, explore and find a disarmed snake, be just as appropriate a development if he had discharged as it would be if he hadn’t? In both cases her lover would have been left with no spark for new desire: he would be more shepherd than general. Is it possible that Behn has imagined a way for a woman whose nature would be adversely changed by a sexual act (a virgin’s pure status, in this case) to in fact experience a sexual encounter, with both the reader and the writer prepared to convince themselves otherwise, and thereby avoid harsh self-recriminations and a public’s scorn? If the descriptions offered afford a close-enough facsimile to sex, and if this sexual encounter, if it had occurred, of the sort to have the reader and writer feel someone should probably be punished for it, then this punishment falls on only one of the two involved: Lysander. That is, neither the Nymph nor our narrator, Behn, is left anywhere in sight, with the nymph

“o’er the fatal plain,” and our narrator along with her, imagining her resentments, ostensibly quite incapable of “guess[ing] Lysander’s” (133) own. We know, however, that as much as Behn professes no other option than to focus on the nymph, her attendance mostly owes to a need to detach herself from—so as to not too closely identity herself with—Lysander, for in *Oroonoko* we find Behn very well informed as to what happens to souls that rage desire with little hope for satisfaction.

My reader might be thinking that I want to link Lysander’s situation to that of the King of Coramantien in *Oroonoko*. I do—but *as a way* of working my way to a discussion of Onahal. The King, indeed, like Lysander, has a passion for a young beauty—in his case, Imoinda—that because of “nature,” the decrees of time, he is unable to consummate: like Lysander, he has been left embarrassingly impotent. When Oroonoko considers “laying violent hands on himself,” reason finally prevails when “[t]hey [i.e., his followers] urged all to him that might oppose his rage,” with “nothing weigh[ing] so greatly with him as the king’s old age, incapable of inuring him with Imoinda” (20). A reasonable Oroonoko begins to realize there may be a way to claim Imoinda after all; and the “plot to rescue a princess” introduces us to another antiquated would-be lover: Onahal, a “past mistress of the old king” (24).

With Onahal we have Behn offering for both her and our contemplation, *a woman*, who, like Behn at the time of writing *Oroonoko*, is subject to the “despites and decays of

time” (24). Being robbed by nature draws Onahal to react as Lysander did upon learning of how nature pilfered him: she does not spare her fury—she “treated the triumphing happy ones with all the severity, as to liberty and freedom, that was possible, in revenge of those honors they rob [her] off” (24). Like Lysander, Onahal has been left with desire; she hopes she might yet again be seen as desirable by youth of the very best quality. In reference to Aboan—just such a youth—we are told:

This young man was not only one of the best quality, but a man extremely well made and beautiful; and coming often to attend the king to the *otan*, he had subdued the heart of the antiquated Onahal, which had not forgot how pleasant it was to be in love. And though she had some decays in her face, she had none in her sense and wit; she was there agreeable still, even to Aboan’s youth, so that he took pleasure in entertaining her with discourses of love. (25)

Oroonoko and Aboan take advantage of Onahal’s self-delusion to secure a re-union between Oroonoko and Imoinda. But at a cost: Aboan must “suffer [. . .] himself to be caressed in bed by Onahal” (28). Onahal might be unaware of her failure to charm Aboan, but those who would identify themselves with her, would live vicariously *through* her, understand that to a young lover her caresses are but to be suffered. The only way a young man and an older woman

can relate with one another where both can be imagined enjoying the experience, is through conversation. However, to a clever and imaginative writer, who might, like Onahal, still hope “she [could] make some impressions [on a young man’s] heart” (25), this is a discovery *to be used* in her own battle between her still enabled wit and whittling age.

Behn has learned—or perhaps rather, confirmed beyond any hopeful countenancing—two important things from her writings of Onahal and Aboan: first, as mentioned, that there is a way in which a young man could be imagined as being charmed by an older woman which allows for intimacy and reciprocal exchanges; second, that there is a fictional role—namely, as a gatekeeper—based on real advantages of the aged, that can introduce and perhaps even necessitate the introduction of an older woman into a story purportedly all about young lovers. Onahal, as a past mistress, is a “guardian or governant [. . .] to the new and young ones [i.e., Imoinda]” (24). Aboan must “compl[y] [. . .] with her desires” (25). “For then, [. . .] her life lying at [his] [. . .] mercy, she must grant [him] [. . .] the request [he] make[s] in [. . .] [Oroonoko’s] behalf” (25). Oroonoko uses what he has at his disposal—a beautiful proxy in Aboan—to realize his desire to be with Imoinda, just as Behn uses the advantages she has as a writer—the ability to create the proxy Onahal—to explore the consequences of a sexual encounter between an older woman and a younger man, allowed the extenuation and stretch that imagination enables. What Behn learns from this exploration, combined with what she learned from “The

Disappointment,” will be put to use in the second part of *Oroonoko*, beginning with Oroonoko’s arrival in Surinam, where Behn, *the writer*, brings herself as close as possible to imagining herself “having subdued the finest of all the King’s subjects to her desires” (26-27).

In the second part of *Oroonoko* Behn does what Onahal wanted to do but could not manage for herself—namely, to subdue “the finest of all the King’s subjects to her desires,” without in “victory” actually becoming more the fool. She captures the attention and compliance of Oroonoko in the same way Onahal did with Aboan: by making clear that the means to what he wants (freedom in this case) lies with her. Much as Onahal and Aboan accomplished for one another, she engages Oroonoko in a reciprocal manner, where each soothes one another’s concerns. She sets the scene for a sexual encounter in much the same way she did with Onahal and Aboan as well, but handles the consummation in a fashion inspired, instead, by Cloris and Lysander—where, that is, overtly, no sex occurs, but where passions are aroused as if it had. Behn is, in her being unaffected by the encounter, therefore much like Cloris; and Oroonoko, with his immediately experiencing a change for the worse, more like Onahal and Lysander. I will expand on each of these machinations in turn.

Oroonoko calls Behn a “Great Mistress” (49), a title in nature akin to the labels—a past mistress, a guardian, a governant—attached to Onahal, a woman Oroonoko knew that “to [. . .] court [. . .] was the way to be great [. . .] [,] [for

her] being [of those] persons that do all affairs and business at court” (25). Behn understands she possesses a similar power over Oroonoko, saying, should he make her doubt him “[i]t would but give us a fear of him, and possibly compel us to treat him so as I should be very loath to behold: that is, it might occasion his confinement” (49). However, although Behn as a character does not do so, Behn *as a writer* makes the same claim upon Oroonoko that Onahal made upon Aboan: To acquire Imoinda, he must first service *her own* sexual needs. Between Behn’s first meeting of Oroonoko and her (i.e., Behn’s) completion of her sporting with him, Imoinda is but twice referred to in the text. The first reference to her within these time-posts is when Behn refers to her in third person, saying she entertained her “with teaching her all the pretty works that I was mistress of, and telling her stories of nuns, and endeavoring to bring her to the knowledge of the true God” (49). Behn, like Onahal, treats the young beauty with “all the severity, as to liberty and freedom, that was possible in revenge of those honors they rob them of” (24). In telling her stories of nuns, she temporarily renders Imoinda a celibate, denying her the sexuality owed a young nymph. The second reference occurs when Oroonoko explains to Behn he fears she might prevent them from returning to his kingdom. He is wise to suspect her, for Behn indeed “holds Imoinda hostage,” just as the envious governess Onahal did, releasing her only *after* she finishes her sports. (We are then told, in a clear after-thought, that despite her complete invisibility in the text Imoinda “was [also] a

sharer in all our adventures” [60].)

As a prelude to romance, Behn interacts with Oroonoko in the same socially acceptable way Onahal had before with Aboan—they converse. This allows for the same kind of back-and-forth involvement with one another, with each taking turns reassuring, tending to the other, we saw between Onahal and Aboan. Keep in mind when reading a description of this foreplay in *Oroonoko*, so to not misconstrue the true nature of the conversational exchanges between the “lovers” therein, the back-and-forth sequence of tension and easing of tension in the passage of overt foreplay between Cloris and Lysander in “The Disappointment”:

Her bright eyes sweet, and yet severe,
Where love and shame confusedly strive,
Fresh vigor to Lysander give;
And breathing faintly in his ear,
She cried, “Cease, cease your vain desire,
Or I’ll call out—what would you do?
My dearer honor even to you
I cannot, must not give—retire,
Or take this life, whose chiefest part
I gave you with the conquest of my heart. (21-30)

When Aboan (after “The whole affair being agreed upon between the prince” [26] and himself) engages with Onahal, she sighs, cries, and asks when he “will [. . .] be sensible of my passion” (26). She is fearful her eyes had already given her

away, and wonders if she possesses beauty-enough to sway him. Aboan calms her, assuring her that her beauty “can still conquer,” and of how “he longs for more certain proofs of love than speaking and sighing” (26). We are told she speaks again, but with a different tone (one as if “she hope it true, and could not forbear believing it” [26]), and offers him a gift of pearls—symbols of beauty that never wane—which prompt Aboan to reassure her he is interested in no other but her (charmed in part, he hopes to have convinced her, by her still extant physical beauty). She forces the pearls into his hands anyway, linking the gift to a setting for her later reception of him. All this naughtiness justifies why they take care “that no notice might be taken of their speaking together” (27), because “speaking together” is clearly just verbal cover for their overt flirting. This “speaking,” presumably, is pleasurable for both parties, for Behn makes clear that as Onahal has lost “none in her sense and wit,” Aboan would take “pleasure in entertaining her with discourses of love” (25).

Behn and Oroonoko share a similar interaction which also clears way for an intimate relationship to develop. But Behn, the writer, precedes it by first linking the two together, telling us that Oroonoko “was impatient to come down to Parham House [. . .] to give me an account of what had happened. I [i.e., Behn] was as impatient to make these lovers a visit” (47). That is, Behn *cheats*—they seem paired before they’ve even met. Again we are told “this new accident made him more impatient of liberty” (48), an upset they follow by

soothing each other. Behn entertains him and “charm[s] him to my company” (49). He admits “these conversations failed not altogether so well to divert him,” and that “he liked the company of us women much above men” (49). This is where we hear him call Behn a “Great Mistress,” of how her word goes “a great way with him” (49). Later he confesses he fears his behavior would provoke her into breaking her word to him. She tries to ease his anxiety, but errs in mentioning “confinement,” an error she “strove to soften again in vain” (49). But he assures her he would “act nothing upon the white people,” and that as for herself, “he would sooner forfeit his eternal liberty, and life itself, than lift his hand against his greatest enemy on that place” (49). After their mutual reassurances, Behn tells us he is again impatient, “full of a spirit all rough and fierce [. . .] that could not be tamed to lazy rest,” and that he is eager to exercise himself in [. . .] actions and sports” (50). They then part, meeting again to sport—but not before Behn has had a chance to tell us about her aromatic garden at St. John’s Hill.

Before comparing the similarity of this garden to the meeting place for Onahal’s and Aboan’s embrace, we should note that Behn and Oroonoko have a nervousness-allaying, *sex-ensuring* conversation similar to their own. Oroonoko, like Onahal, admits he suspects his over-eager behavior has ruined any chance of realizing his desires. Behn, like Aboan previously, is then offered a chance to reassure her partner. But Behn, in expressing her own fears, opens herself up to ruin, a concern Oroonoko can abate by assuring her he would

do her no harm. We are further told, as we had been before with Aboan, that they are impatient for activity beyond conversation. With Aboan: “those few minutes we have are forced to be snatched for more certain proof of love than speaking and sighing; and such I *languish* for” (26; emphasis added); and with Oroonoko: suddenly he is all-“impatient” for sports and vigorous activity. While “languish” is the adjective most overtly linked to sex in *Oroonoko*, we remember reading in “The Disappointment” of “One day the amorous Lysander, / By an *impatient* passion swayed” (1-2; emphasis added). We should note, too, the marked similarity between how Lysander concludes his wooing of Cloris and Oroonoko’s final reassurance to Behn. Lysander claims sex with, “Or take this life, whose chiefest part I gave you with the conquest of my heart” (29-30)—that is, with his offering up his life and his reference to his lover as a vigorous conqueror. Oroonoko finishes by offering to “forfeit” “life itself,” on behalf of an empowered defender. Full submission is offered, and a lover’s physical needs are supplanted in place of courtliness, concern, and shy retreat.

We know the activity Aboan will be up to is sex, and we know *this* about the setting for the initial setting for his reunion with Onahal: it will occur at a “grove of the otan, which was all of oranges and citrons.” Oroonoko and Aboan are instructed to wait there, to be taken away to (the bedchambers of) Imoinda and Onahal respectively. Before Oroonoko and Behn engage in their sports, Behn tells us about her house on St. John’s Hill, which has a “grove of

orange and lemon trees” (52). Through successive paragraphs we are immersed within fragrant imagery; Behn is preparing for herself as she once prepared for Clovis, “a lone thicket made for love” (21). We are told of an “eternal Spring” of “trees, bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit from blooming buds to ripe autumn, groves of oranges, lemons, citrons, figs nutmegs, and noble aromatics, continually bearing their fragrances” (51). Of this grove we are told she is sure “the whole globe of the world cannot show so delightful a place as this grove was” (52). And once delineated, she is now herself anxious for action, telling us, “But to our sports” (52). Appropriate to a scene I believe sexual in nature, the sports have about them the feel of a racy bedroom encounter. Behn has moved from mention of an “eternal Spring” to speaking of “the hot countries” (57), from sexual priming to lustful satiation. With the climactic encounter between Onahal and Aboan, Behn spares us the details, so to speak, but it is better in any case for us to have “The Disappointment” in mind when experiencing Behn’s accounting of all her hot sporting action.

In “The Disappointment” Behn uses a telling metaphor when describing Lysander’s penis—it is a “snake” (110). But this is when she is writing in mock-pastoral mode, when he is a shepherd. It is perhaps, though, not too bold a conjecture that had the penis been featured when writing mock-epic it would have been referred to as a sword. Oroonoko, like Lysander, is a mighty warrior—he is Caesar!, and thus no shepherd. “[H]e took Mr. Martin’s sword [desiring] [. . .] him

to stand aside, or follow the ladies,” and “he met this monstrous beast [i.e., a tiger they are hunting] of might, size and vast limbs, who came with open jaws upon him, and fixing his awful stern eyes full upon those of the beast, and putting himself into a very steady and good aiming posture of defense, ran his sword quite through his breast down to his very heart, home to the hilt of the sword” (53). Once he has slain the tiger, Behn rejoins him (she had previously run away), sees him “lug out the sword from the bosom of the tiger, who was laid in her blood on the ground” (53), and is surprised by his gifting of a tiger cub at her feet.

I believe this passage arouses us in much the same way as if we had just witnessed a sexual encounter between Oroonoko and Behn. As with Lysander, who was “Ready to taste a thousand joys” (71), Oroonoko “meets this monstrous beast” (53). As with Cloris, Behn is elsewhere. When Cloris returns from her trance, and when Behn returns after the kill, both witness an item similar in nature to a penis that has lost its potency, that has gone flaccid. Lysander’s penis is a “flower,” owing to his inability to bring “fleeting vigor back” (87); Oroonoko *lugs* his sword, suggesting—considering how previously his running the tiger on through to the hilt suggested the deep penetration of an erect penis—the labor in the withdrawal of a discharged one. The cute cub is akin to the mentioning of flowers after a sexual encounter: it suits the relaxed mood and play of consummated love. Further, if we take Oroonoko laying the cub at her feet as his presenting her with a gift, he mimics here Onahal’s gift of pearls to Aboan,

something we know was closely linked to an anticipated sexual encounter between them. In fact, to provide and receive gifts is the primary impetus behind further sports. He asks, “What trophies and garlands, ladies, will you make, if I bring you the heart of this ravenous beast?” (53-54). Behn tells us, “We all promised he should be rewarded at all our hands” (54). The hunting of tigers is explicitly linked here to rewards by women; and Behn, as the writer of “The Disappointment,” as having written, “All her unguarded beauties lie / The spoils and trophies of the enemy” (39-40), clearly shows an inclination to link trophies to sexual consummation.

If we are not convinced Behn thinks a sword a penis in this context, what of a snake, or a near-snake, that appears while they sport? There is a “numb eel” (55), an eel Behn had eaten. And if not the eel, what of fishing rods or flutes, which are also present? Or what about each and/or all in conjunction with the jungle natives, when they:

By degrees [. . .] grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touched us, laying their hands upon all the features of our faces, feeling our breasts and arms, taking up one petticoat, then wondering to see another, admiring our shoes and stockings, but more our garters, which we gave them, and they tied about their legs [. . .] In fine, we suffered them to survey us as they pleased, and we thought they would never have done admiring us. (57)

Or in conjunction with how similar these natives' "surveying" seems to how Behn described Lysander's lustful advancement upon Cloris? Lysander didn't "[b]y degrees [. . .] grow more bold," but he did "without respect or fear [. . .] seek the object of his vows" (41-42), which is not as incremental but toward the same end. Lysander didn't "touch [her] [. . .], laying [his] hands upon all the features of [her] face, feeling our breasts and arms," but he did "Kiss her mouth" (34), "press / Upon her swelling snowy breast" (37), and "By swift degrees advance where / his daring hand that altar seized" (44-45), which amounts to much the same, if more artfully guided. Lysander didn't take advantage of an "offer" "to survey as [he] pleased," nor can we be sure he "never stopped admiring" her, but he did try to take full advantage of Cloris being "Abandoned by her pride and shame / [so] She does her softest joys dispense / Offering her virgin innocence" (67), which is no less the enthused partaking of pleasures before him. And it is actually possible that to Behn—the writer—Lysander would in some sense actually have been there if Oroonoko hadn't been. But despite all to the contrary—*he was*.

Just as Behn was absent from Oroonoko's encounter with a predator, Oroonoko is absent from the one present here, and we should consider these absences equivalent and suggestive—as implicating. Behn uses a technique here she develops in "The Disappointment" where a sexual encounter/experience is communicated but where no such

thing is *overtly* shown to take place. Both Oroonoko and Behn have sexual and intense encounters where, in each case, one of them is absent from the scene. Yet once consummation occurs—with the lugging out of the sword, with the natives finishing their surveying—the absent partner suddenly reappears. There is a sense, though, that the ostensibly absent partner was actually present throughout. That is, assuming we accept Onahal as a version of Behn, a proxy in the nature and intensity of her desires, can we hear of a ravenous beast that fixes "her long nails in his flesh" and not think of predatory Onahal, who "took her dear Aboan [. . .] where he suffered himself to be caressed in bed" (28)? And can we encounter the natives and not also have in mind the princely but still native Oroonoko, a link we first make but start setting when subsequently told of how as "[G]eneral" Caesar he "had in mind to see and talk with their war captains," of how, though he considered their "courage too brutal to be applauded," he still "expressed his esteem of them" (59), and when we come to know all of them not just as warriors but as trophy hunters?

Just as Imoinda was available to Oroonoko once Onahal had "tasted a thousand joys" from Aboan, with the sporting now complete, the pair is reunited: evidence, I think, toward understanding the reading experience of the sports as satisfying anyone who could identify with Onahal's need to believe herself still "of beauty enough engaging [. . .] to be desirable," who hopes she "can have [young] lovers still" (26), and who would similarly be inclined to first take advantage of

the young before granting them access to their own joys. I believe this *Behn's* desire as much as it is Onahal's, but because Onahal's desire, once realized, leads to a shameful situation where her audience understands her physical charms were in fact non-existing, that they had actually had no effect other than to amuse or—more likely—horrify, that her rapture in sex was for him simply a suffering, even with Behn's better disguised affair (so that “no notice might be taken” [27]), some shame would come from having contrived it. Fortunately for Behn she has learned this shame can be dispersed through the same art that brought it into existence in the first place. *Through her plotting*, that is, she can arrange for all the consequences arising from shameful behavior to fall on but one of the two actually involved.

After Cloris flees him, Lysander's “silent griefs swell up to storms, / And not one god his fury spares; / He cursed his birth, his fate, his stars” (147). Shortly after the sports, Oroonoko's griefs also swell up to storms, as he exempts little of their daily life from his curses:

Caesar [Oroonoko] [. . .] made a harangue to them of the miseries and ignominies of slavery; counting up all their toils and sufferings, under such loads, burdens, and drudgeries as were fitter for beasts than men, senseless brutes than human souls. He told them it was not for days, months, or years, but for eternity; there was no end to be of their misfortunes. They suffered not like men who might find a glory and

fortitude in oppression, but like dogs that loved the whip and bell, and fawned the more they were beaten. That they had lost the divine quality of men, and were become insensible asses, fit only to bear, Nay worse, an ass, or dog, or horse having done his duty, could lie down in retreat, and rise to work again, and while he did his duty endured no stripes; but men, villainous, senseless men such as they, toiled on all the tedious week till black Friday, and then, whether they worked or not, whether they were faulty or meriting, they promiscuously, the innocent with the guilty, suffered the infamous whip, the sordid stripes, from their fellow slaves till their blood trickled from all parts of their body, blood whose every drop ought to be revenged with a life of some of those tyrants that impose it. “And why,” said he, “my dear friends and fellow sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we, by the chance of war, become their slaves? This would not anger a noble heart, this would not animate a soldier's soul. No, but we are bought and sold like apes, or monkeys, to be the sport of women, fools, and cowards, and the support of rogues, runagades, that have abandoned their own countries, for raping, murders, thefts, and villainies. Do you not hear every day how they upbraid each other with infamy of life below the wildest salvages, and shall we render

obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no one human virtue left to distinguish them from the vilest creatures? Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands? (61-62)

As with Lysander, who, after cursing his birth, his fate, and the stars, finishes by cursing the “soft bewitching influence” of a woman (149), Oroonoko concludes his own diatribe by saying: “But if there were a woman among them so degenerate from love and virtue to chose slavery before the pursuit of her husband, and with the hazard of her life to share with him in his fortunes, that such a one ought to be abandoned, and left as a prey to the common enemy” (63). Quite a change in Oroonoko here from the one who asked of Behn, “What trophies and garlands, ladies, will you make me, if I bring you home the heart of this ravenous beast” (53-54), and who “made it his business to search out and provide for our entertainment” (59). But the effect of reading this very lengthy, this very aggressive diatribe is to have the sports which immediately preceded it become of much less interest, as a man savagely battles against a world pit against him. And so, too, the understanding of Behn and Oroonoko as a couple.

Oroonoko is made into a “monster of the wood” (72) just after Behn begins to manifest herself in the text more as the writer of *Oroonoko* than as a character within it, a writer who increasingly associates herself with qualities notably different from transmogrified Oroonoko’s: “We met on the

river with Colonel Martin, a man of great gallantry, wit, and goodness, and, whom I have celebrated in a character of my new comedy, by his own name, in memory of so brave a man. He was wise and eloquent” (68). Meanwhile, Oroonoko exists a world apart: “his grief swelled up to rage; he tore, he raved, he roared, like some monster of the wood” (72). Behn actually distances herself from him in several ways. First, she attempts to convince us that the sporting was of no particular import; she describes it ostensibly because it was her near duty to record all instances of his activity she partook in or had been aware of—but right due for a noble personage. Then from a chronicler whose relationship with her subject implies a respectable distance between them, she becomes a writer of comedies, making Oroonoko but one subject of interest of a varied many. Second, as Behn distances herself further and further from *Oroonoko*—forward to her writing of him in the present rather than the past, and away geographically to England—Oroonoko, despite his rage and capacity for effective action, is doomed to be trapped and killed on remote southern Surinam. Third, and as we have seen, Oroonoko becomes of a kind that it no longer seems likely that Behn actually could well “guess [the nature of] his soul” (134).

Why, one might well ask, is all this connivance necessary, since the Behn that is a character in the novel is a much, much younger Behn than the one writing it, was in fact of an age and status where it might seem not so inappropriate if, while still being primarily fixed upon Imoinda, always

devoted to her, Oroonoko acknowledged some interest in casual flirtations with a genteel hostess? An obvious explanation would lie in her having chosen to account for the rise and fall of a near singularly great and noble prince, and such rarities were understood to act only in very specific ways, to hold to a tight script, as it were, involving much more lordly forbearance than courtly sweets. Possibly—but I don't buy it. Instead, the masking owes to the *character* Behn being, in a very real sense, the very same age as the *writer* Behn while writing/experiencing *Oroonoko* so to help intensify, make more real, the feeling that the sports are happening to the writer during the here and now of the time of writing rather than some time before in the less stark long ago. Note that Behn plays the role of a great governess, a role we have been instructed to associate with the aged, not the youthful. Note that Behn primarily emphasizes, draws attention to, her skill in conversation—a skill, along with wit, we have been told so prominent in the aged that it can substitute for such charms no longer available. And note most especially that the setting for the sporting is a near mirror-image the one imagined for the aged Onahal, when Oroonoko and Aboan paid her call in their excited sport to rescue a princess.

Some readers might object to the claim that Oroonoko's fate was largely determined by the current psychological/sexual needs of the author, since his fate—or at least, his execution—is a match for that suffered upon Charles I, but I would argue for understanding this objection

as but a consequence of successful authorial misdirection. Behn needs for both herself and her readers to think the novel primarily a faithful, pious, recording of a great man's life. Why? Because she must disarm herself (and us, her imagined and real readers and critics) of her considerable poetic awareness while reading the piece. Incurring upon herself and her readers the upright, serious, intolerant reading posture—this containment—is crucial, because if we turn to the work alert to poetic technique and contemplative of courtier's motive, the real intentions for writing the piece become more open to view—and to critique.

Through Onahal, Behn has shown us there exists in her time a notable distinction and a loaded difference between speaking/writing and real action. Harold Weber writes that “speaking and thinking venery [sexual desires] define the limits of a woman's sexual prerogatives: to indulge those thoughts, to turn speech into action, confronts female characters [. . .] with the vast gulf between the maid or wife and the whore” (*The Restoration Rake-Hero* 133). Yet women are in a bind because “[e]ven though libertine attitudes depended on assumptions that would seem to promise acceptance of female sexuality, women remained unable to enjoy the sexual liberties taken for granted by men. Women after the Restoration, even among the most debauched section of the population, occupy a world of strict sexual limitations” (148). There was a “severe morality directed against women when what all knew to go on in private suddenly became public [. . .] [:] all the prudery of the Court

was let loose [. . .] [,] vociferous in demanding justice” (148). Yet we cannot understand the distinction between writing about sexual desires and acting upon them, whatever the importance in the distinction, as being well articulated or understood at this time. Owing to her being a successful playwright, Behn was well aware that writing for a public amounted to indecent self-exposure to the world. There *was* great risk, as Weber explains:

Yet the public ridicule she suffered reveals the very high price she had to pay for her success. [. . .] In attempting to move outside of the restricted roles ordinarily occupied by women, Behn became a convenient target for those who refused to accept the participation of women in the larger social world: To publish one’s work, then, was to make oneself ‘public’: to expose oneself to ‘the world.’ Women who did so violated their feminine modesty both by egressing from the private sphere which was their proper domain and by permitting foreign eyes access to what ought to remain hidden and anonymous. (151)

Weber tells us that Behn simply refused to remain anonymous, and reminds us that “in doing so [. . .] she placed herself in a position where both her morality and her femininity could be questioned” (151). So we have a situation where women possess circumscribed possibilities for

acceptable sexual gratification, in a libertine world where sexual desires constitute the context in which everyone participates and can be expected to be judged within: Is it not then appropriate to assume that in the one area where sexual desire might be expressed—in writing—that these written words become so inflated to trespass beyond the vicarious and actually become lived experience? And if any slip from privately kept to public evidencing of the desire should be expected to be eagerly used to fuel the popular courtier sport of reducing a lady to a whore, is it not likely that Behn would need to disguise from her readers, from *herself*, the satisfaction of her sexual desires through her writing? The best way to dissuade both herself and her readers from considering other possible but less legitimate purposes for the novel is to bring into the story an execution that couldn’t help but remind contemporaries of Charles I’s own. She presents us, she presents herself, with quite the challenge: You couldn’t possibly be thinking sex, anything at all lurid, while I document my umbrage at the execution of our past king, could you? However we would answer, we might at least to some extent back off and disarm ourselves of the conceptual tools necessary for an alert poetic reading of her work, so that we are not in some way culpable of disregard for hierarchy and right-place, prove ourselves in sympathy with evident barbarians. She wants pious readers, not wits, poetically informed and ready-primed to note the methods of their kind.

But if we *are* ready to spot contrivance, we must

acknowledge that the structuring of *Oroonoko* is similar to that of “The Disappointment.” Specifically, that the number of words compared as a proportion to the whole of the work chronicling Oroonoko’s fate after the sports, is not dissimilar to the number of lines detailing Lysander’s fate after Cloris departs him in “The Disappointment.” I believe this to be space to ensure a comfortable, an assured, distancing of the narrator from her male protagonist. This distancing, required so we do not associate the passions aroused in *Oroonoko* with the writer of the work in “The Disappointment,” is not as crucial for Behn in that work because the passions at work there are explored using familiar mock-epic and mock-pastoral imagery, which naturally work to help keep the writer in mind as a wit, as a removed observer of the scene; but it is crucial in *Oroonoko*, where to *close* the distance between herself and her fictional lover she tells us over and over again that what she writes is a *true* account of all that happened. By telling us immediately after the sports that she is offering a chronicle of real happenings, she helps substantiate them as such: she is reminding herself that she is describing the sports, not simply narrating them. The distinction she would have understood between description and narration is crucial to understand here, because therein lies an explanation as to why Behn chose to write a *chronicle* of *Oroonoko* rather than a more overtly fictional *Oroonoko*.

According to Howard Marchitello, “[d]escription [. . .] resists the appropriative nature of possession that comes to characterize narrationality in which the other always exists

secondarily—after the fact, as it were, of the *narrator’s* own primary and privileged existence” (94; emphasis added). By telling herself she is offering a faithful record and description of events, in the sense Marchitello describes, Behn manages them so they seem exterior to herself, so they accumulate and become more something of the real world than simply of her own making. Her veiled sexual exchange with Oroonoko becomes, not passions created through her imagination, a product of her own mind, her own writing, but passions generated in her as the consequence of actions *of someone else* towards her. Behn, in writing in a way which comes close to crossing the private/public divide, with all of its associated perilous consequences, is precariously involved in the passions of this text in a way she is not in “The Disappointment.” It is *because* the passions are made to feel so real that Oroonoko must, like Lysander, experience all sorts of compromising emotional states, making him a monster: *Because* Oroonoko is elevated to a status where he is more than a narrative construct, is more than words, is more nearly real, Behn is able to, and does, dump the equally real agitating emotions she experiences in creating and immersing herself in a near sexual encounter *into him*. Thereby, the terrible change of status normally due a woman who compromises her virtues is—as was true with Cloris—entirely left for her male partner to experience: a brutal but effective solution.

More attending to poetics, we would note in *Oroonoko* the doubleness of the sequence involving the rescue of a princess in Coramantien and the sporting sequence in

Surinam. We would then understand the sequence in Coramantien, precisely because it leads to the re-union of Oroonoko and Imoinda, as no mere diversion but rather as the *climax* of the first part of *Oroonoko*: the part arousing the highest degree of interest owing to it satisfying a desire we had been bated into anticipating since the beginning of the work. Together, both of these scenes form the center of the work, with everything else either leading up to and away from them, a chiasmus (AB / BA) where “A” is Oroonoko distant from Behn; the movement from “A” to “B” a closing of this distance in the first half (“’tis fit I tell you the manner of bringing them to these new colonies” [9]); with “B” Oroonoko united to a representative of the writer—Onahal in part one, and Behn in part two; and “B” to “A” the plot of the second half of the work, the movement from Oroonoko and Behn as a couple to him once again removed and remote from her.

This is why criticism of *Oroonoko* that focuses on anything other than Behn’s use of the text to satisfy her own sexual desires, testifies so well to Behn’s skill as a writer. Her expertise in poetics is such she can subdue what ought really to command our attendance: the structuring of the scenes and the words we would attend to less narrowly if we thought of the work as a contrivance, as not so much a work of sober accounting as an act of play and mischief. In “The Disappointment” Behn shows that words like “snake” are to be primarily understood as metaphors for penis, and words like “trophy,” metaphors or similes for sexual satisfaction, yet

as I have shown the sporting sequence is full of penis-seeming objects, contains several references to trophies, and she still claims (surprisingly convincingly, considering how many critics consider the sequence odd for a reason Behn would hardly object to—namely, for it amounting to a unnecessary intrusion in a work mostly concerned with greater things) the sequence testifies to Oroonoko’s character!” (69).

Some critics have pointed out how Behn creates protagonists that are flawed so that they are primed for other’s exploitation. Robert Chibka, for one, writes that Oroonoko is made to be “the perfect fool for the knaves who surround him” (“Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman’s Invention” 515), which he believes Oroonoko’s tragic flaw. But Chibka does not implicate Behn, the writer, as akin in mischief intent these untrustworthy knaves, even though she, being the one inclined to make him into a “perfect fool” in the first place, was certainly empowered to make use of him herself. But according to Chibka, if she is using him in any way at his expense, it is only to better please and serve her audience, which still leaves her actually mostly self-denying: “disdain[ing] the arrangement of a narrative ‘at the Poet’s pleasure,’ [. . .] [Behn] admits to editing and arranging her story so that what was ‘pleasant to us’ need not ‘prove tedious and heavy to [her] [. . .] Reader’”; “Pleasure (the reader’s not the poet’s) will indeed dictate the management of her story” (514). Chibka is no fool; he for example recognizes that “[a]t times *Oroonoko* seems to resemble the Surinamese numb eel,

making critics on contact lose their feel for narrative texture” (511). But he is yet still naïve enough to not ask if Oroonoko is made to seem so susceptible to other’s use, not just to suit knaves’ alteriors or audience’ expectations but to better serve and satisfy the depriver herself—Behn.

In her *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife*, Jane Spencer implicates the writer Behn in a way Chibka fails to. She believes Behn uses Imoinda as a proxy, but shares Chibka’s understanding of Behn as virtuous. She writes: “Imoinda here is a fantasy substitute for the heroic action the narrator cannot take. The split between the two women expresses anxieties about narrative position: to take on a narrator’s authority, it seems, is also to accept a position on the fringes of the action, unable to intervene” (232). In suggesting that the writing of the text was so vivid and powerful for Behn that she would want to be in on the sports, Spencer’s argument is similar to mine, but in suggesting that Behn’s position on “the fringes of action” was somehow forced on her, and by arguing that Behn has well-meaning intentions for Oroonoko at this point of the text, also so very different. I will quote from Spencer once again as I believe the following passage offers the most familiar and most preferred conception of Oroonoko and Behn for contemporary critics:

Behn’s *Oroonoko*, then, is a troubled and opaque text, full of anxious claims and obscure quarrels. It is not a clear attack on the institution and practices of slavery, but the sympathetic treatment of Oroonoko and

Imoinda, the descriptions of white cruelty, and even the narrator’s very inconsistencies and divided position, have the effect of presenting a disturbing picture of colonial life, and provide the germ for the later, abolitionist development of Oroonoko’s story. (232)

Spencer does note that, beginning especially with “the 1696 ‘Memoirs’ of Behn, whether composed, compiled, or merely commissioned by [her friend Charles] Gildon” (34), eighteenth-century readers were drawn “to the titillating idea of a sexual relationship between Oroonoko and [Behn]” (35). Spencer says that it was through a repetition of rumors and denials “that eighteenth-century readers approached Oroonoko alerted to the idea of intimacy between the writer and a hero who was understood to be authentic” (35). I am arguing that we should be alert for the same—and as well to the poetic toolkit for writing of sexual passion she had created for herself by the time of her writing of *Oroonoko*. I have argued that Behn herself would have been pleased by the reaction of contemporary critics to her writings because they have largely exonerated her of any wrongdoing, choosing instead to focus their hostility on other targets. Like Behn, who dumped disturbing passions into Lysander and Oroonoko so to find herself prettily emptied of them herself, critics have targeted men /patriarchy and left us with a near pristine Behn. Thereby, Behn has achieved the wished-for effect upon us she could not hope to have procured in her

contemporaries. Still, even amongst her own contemporaries, Behn could be heralded as one who “did at once a Masculine wit express / And all the softness of a Femal tenderness” (266). She could be compared to Eve, who, although associated with the fall, was also “[their] first mother” (266). Spencer tells us that the “idea of [Behn] as a female champion for other women to emulate proved a potent one in the following decade [after her death],” even though present too were early anticipations of the “worries of many later women writers [her failure in virtue]” (31).

Spencer, like so many critics, believes that emerging understandings of Behn as primarily a writer of sexual fantasies is *necessarily* linked to a disparaging culture-wide re-evaluation of women. Spencer writes how a “link made between [. . .] Behn and Milton’s Eve illuminates the formation and masculinization of the English literary canon during the eighteenth century. It is only one example of the recurrent definition of her in terms of the sinful and sexual body as opposed to the heaven-seeking and spiritual mind of the male genius” (267). Milton is conceived in a way Behn wished she could be: “His choice of heavenly subject made the poet himself appear a spiritual figure, rising heavenwards” (267). Behn, by contrast, with “her familiar, wordly-wise poetic persona and fictional narrator, her discussion of sex, political intrigue, and other mundane matters, and her choice of comedy and irony” (267), could hardly be more opposite. Behn, and female poets in general, began to be conceived in such a way that “made so much more of her [and their]

femininity and sexuality than of her creativity” (268). There arose the growth of a “myth about Behn, which both drew on received notions of the relationship between a female writer and her work, and set the tone for the reception of later women writers. The myth is that Behn’s writing reflects a life pre-eminently concerned with sexual love” (20).

And Spencer tells us that “[t]o discuss an author’s life in this way—as the story of her writing career—always risks leaving the impression that this is the way she herself thought about it” (21), something, as I have shown, she attempts to exonerate Behn from. I am well aware that an estimation of Behn as a female poet of over-flowing passions can be used to sustain social-sphere divisions by sex, of calcified suppression and cruelty, and I think it very likely that a good portion of the eighteenth-century interpretation of Behn’s works as just imaginative dalliances between a writer and her fantasy lovers, *was* moved, not in any way to fairly assess her but simply to madden her. But, still—*this is* what she was up to. It would have been much more accurate and fair an assessment had it showed more appreciation for the intelligence, creativity, and bravado required to create a space wherein an author could plausibly be imagined enjoying sexual pleasures with her literary creations, but to my mind it is still a vastly more accurate reading of her work than ones which have Behn spinning lively tales—but principally *for* sober intent. The real problem for us moderns is our difficulty in understanding that this need not be a put-down. It can and should be understood as a tribute, a call for her

revival as a writer to be celebrated, especially for her *not* being in the mold of the eighteenth-century man of reason. How immensely dull this conception was! To my mind, to have denigrated passions, have them principally embodied in women, denied men greater acquaintance with the kinds of feelings and passions that make life most worth living. Behn lived at a time where the sexual appetite wasn't "for mature audiences only," always something of a no-no, that is, but where women still faced being seen as whores if caught indiscreetly acting upon their sexual desires. Further, a younger woman was the only appropriate target for sexual amours: the desires in older women were to be suffered, were fit only for ridicule. For Behn to create a simulacrum, an artificial world in a historical account/novel that allowed for satisfaction of this desire, is a remarkable accomplishment to be celebrated. And as for the idea that what women require most is full recognition of their unlimited *intellectual* capacities, I have two responses: first, the millennium (plus) long "elevation of the cognitive over the emotional aspect of our mind" (Greenspan 2) which has so profoundly influenced Western thought, needs to be exorcised so to stop its haunting of our present; second, if we create or need such a world, you can be sure that I for one will start turning to romance to find myself living in a more humanly satisfying world. And to those who would frown upon me, not share with me my departure, risk inuring themselves to my fate: I'm with Amazon princesses in a grove of ripening citrus—and you? Yes, the bitter, in the form of anacondas, has arrived,

but I've learned clever means are at hand to make them actually add to all our fun.

Works Cited

- Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko*. Ed. Janet Todd. Toronto: Penguin, 2003.
- . "The Disappointment," *Oroonoko, the Rover, and Other Works*. Ed. Janet Todd. Toronto: Penguin, 1992. 331-34. Print.
- Chibka, Robert. "Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman's Invention": Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Winter 1998, 510-35. Print.
- Greenspan, Stanley. *The Growth of the Mind: And the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997. Print.
- Marchitello, Howard. *Narrative and Meaning in Early-Modern England: Browne's Skull and Other Histories*. Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- Spencer, Jane. *Afra Behn's Afterlife*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
- Weber, Harold. *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformation in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England*. Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1986. Print.

The Search for a Way of Being (Nov. 2001)

Ridley Scott has recently told us that Decker, from *Blade Runner*, is in fact a replicant. There are several reasons why I think this a disservice to fans of the film. My primary concern is that it substantiates takings of it that focus primarily on the characters at the expense of, as a cover for, explorations of *our own* responses to Scott's ominous city-world and its subjected denizens. The choice to create a city-world so reminiscent of our own today was certainly not an arbitrary one. We have been offered a cold simulacrum—a *replication*—of our own cities, designed, surely, to bring to conscious awareness likely feelings of ambivalence many of us have towards them. I believe the reason we are interested in Decker (a response so natural to us that the camera's interest in him mimics our own: it becomes our own viewing eye) is that his movement, his explorations, seem like they might tend to our ambivalence. This is why we follow him, and why we pay close attention to what he (also Gaff—but Decker in particular) attends to. This search for our own identity, for a

right way of being in this simulacrum of our own city-world, is well captured in this sequence through camera placement, camera movement (or lack there-of), and the mise-en-scene.

Certainly not all sequences in the film are well suited for self-reflection—there are ample sequences that are either tense (and thus encourage us to self-protect rather than explore) or exciting (where we mimic the mindset of the chaser or the chased)—but this one actually is. The opening shot helps us feel composed and relaxed—tranquil. Camera placement, lack of camera movement, and the particular nature of the mise-en-scene in this shot produce this effect. We are offered a level, extreme long-view shot of the environs, where we float above most of the city. The scene is near picturesque, with its mostly still field of black space, wherein we encounter a protagonist to key in on at a quieting remove from all other objects. The movement in the mise-en-scene is the predictable, slow, curving of the flying car as it moves away from us. Knowing the camera eye not fixed to the potentially unnerving proximity of the close-up, and knowing the action to be something *we* pursue (i.e., we are closing in on the car), the next shot—a following shot with low-angle framing, situated at a building across the street, several levels above street level but much closer to it than we were to the car—seems guided by our own interest. The probing, inquisitive camera “eye” has become, for all intents and purposes, our own, and will remain so through the rest of the sequence.

After the second shot, where we look down on Decker

and Gaff via high-angle framing, we cut to a shot where our interest is drawn upwards, via a low-angle framing shot, to a sign flashing YUKON on top of the building nearest them. It is almost as if we are presenting ourselves with a choice, the same choice we had in the first shot of the sequence: Should we direct our interest to the flashing neon-sign and the message it cannot help but present us with, or do we continue to attend to Decker and Gaff? The camera looks back to Decker and Gaff (switches to the previous high-angle frame), and follows its present course—anticipating their destination, it reappears in the replicant’s apartment—and here it surely reflects our own decision when confronted with a choice away from a giant flashing Coca-Cola sign that announces DRINK(!) while referring but to a simple beverage, and a YUKON sign so bespeaking of the artificial we have to fight to keep our known sense of the Yukon unadulterated upon sight of it. Surely what will interest us most will be something we must search for and find, not something openly presented to us within the city’s invasive skin.

With the next shot we are inside the replicant’s apartment, looking at Decker and Gaff from the apartment’s perimeter. We know the bright neon lights we briefly attended to failed to present us with “answers”—mightn’t Decker or Gaff come upon something more satisfying? We focus on the two, via a long shot that lasts until both Decker and Gaff have entered the apartment, as if considering for a brief moment our preferred candidate. We choose Decker, who in his movement across the room mimics the familiar,

accustomed movement of the car in the opening shot. Obvious choice, really, for Gaff presents us, with his city-immigrant racial flavor and his Old South, bow-tied, country-gentleman attire, the same feeling of uncertainty, of incongruence—like we are all subjects to be played with—we felt upon sight of the YUKON sign. Moreover, Gaff in his stillness, with his dandyish attire and muted expressions, seems imperturbable, quite ready to mock anyone’s inconveniently experienced emotions—including, we intuit, our own, if they should ever somehow come into play. Though we will cut back to him while Decker is in the bathroom, Gaff, no doubt, is our *second* choice.

We do not exactly *follow* Decker—that is, we do not trail behind him, looking over his shoulder. Instead, seeing in the previous shot that he was heading into a chamber (a bathroom), anticipating his destination, we cut to a shot where we are inside the chamber, looking at him from the same vantage point we assumed in the previous shot. However, we will follow him, the camera *will* come to situate itself just over his shoulder, as he spots and finds something that captures his interest. The movement reflects our eagerness: What has he found? Is it fit for our consideration, too? We, the camera, now cut to an extreme close-up of his hand cuspings a scale he has placed in a small plastic bag. The scale, in conjunction with the hand that holds it, are key components of the mise-en-scene: one of three groupings we will be presented with in this sequence *through* the explorations (with Decker) or manipulations (by Gaff) of two

people who, through their actions and their interests, are showing us how they themselves exist within this world. *This is our own keenest interest*—how to involve ourselves in this world?, what to make of this world?; and we show this in our switch to extreme close-ups when we spot objects like the scale that may afford more self-understanding than could possibly come from commandant neon signs.

The scale, though, in the same way as the *Blade Runner* city-world is and is not a city of our own experience, is and is not “us,” is a jostling reacquaintance with part of our own selves. Though neither we nor Decker have scales, bathrooms, via the tub, sink, or toilet, have traces of our body surface that are as disturbing to our sense of what it means to be human as are the skins of our cities, and involve us in uncomfortable self-questioning. Is the body just enfleshment? Mightn’t it be (or somehow come to be) beyond simply necessary, itself *possess*, rather than just carry, essence, anima—soul? This a consideration we are more likely to make in regards to humans than with replicants, not because they are obviously all function down to their densely wired core, but because our souls have winnowed to the point where the most banal, brutal, dispensable—*dead*—aspects of our bodies seem to occasion the truest account of who we now are.

Troubling... so we switch to Gaff, who, for a moment at least, actually seems the more appealing of the pair. We cut to an extreme close-up of his hand putting down something he was making—an origami stickman—on a table. Momentarily,

this feels reassuring. He is not *finding* anything; rather, he is exerting himself, making a comment on, we think, the current behavior of Decker. Gaff, through this simple, confident action, provides visual evidence that one *can* avoid being self-implicated, adversely affected by one’s actions, if one places oneself along the perimeter, making comments about someone more directly involved and exposed. Gaff might be making an honest appraisal of Decker, but not one likely shorn of irony or irreverence (we notice the stickman’s erection). This brings to mind a dissonance-incurring question: If like Gaff we are mostly uninvolved, for the most part extraneous to a world we count ourselves still part of, to what extent can we fairly be said to be *living* our lives—to what extent, even, are we *alive*? Unlike us, Gaff has a hand, and what a hand represents—an embodied existence in the film world. But *through* the action of his hand we understand he really exists more like a removed, disembodied eye—that is, *like us*—than one enfleshed. Thus reminded of a way of being similar to our own which was unsubstantial, unsatisfying enough to motivate our search for a more satisfying way of being in the first place, we choose to once again follow Decker, hoping he might find us something just as interesting but more satisfying to contemplate.

We are not disappointed. Decker’s subsequent exploration leads to an object which, though it will likely bring to Decker’s mind questions pertaining to his own identity (notably, is he a replicant?), suggests for us and potentially for him a way of being through a choice of what

and what not to value which makes these questions, if not moot, potentially nowhere near as vital for our self-understanding. Decker does not fear being a replicant because this would make him one of the hunted; he fears it because it makes his experiences, his own treasured memories, an implantation from some disinterested other person—because it would make him more someone else’s personal agenda than himself a person ensouled. But what cannot be an implantation is his experience of the here and now, and his choice whether *to make for himself* the kind of experiences worthy of photos *is* under his control, subject, only, to his decision on how to relate to the people he meets, objects he finds, the environments he finds himself within.

The third prop we will focus on, then, are the replicant’s photos, hidden under several layers of shirts and sweaters. Unlike with the tub, wherein Decker found evidence in minuscule form but bared to view, the photos are not found in the empty first drawer we focus on: they are instead concealed in the second drawer. Scott, in choosing to place this prop under shirts and sweaters, offers us an encounter with a replicant’s home life which actually suggests a human(e), warm persona. The replicant is protecting, insulating, his photos, keeping them at a distance from casual observance—what you are supposed to do with intimate treasures. But this isn’t all he is up to. Here is someone who is not so sensitized to and determined by the threatening environment so to feel the need to take it into consideration in his every judgment. The placement is appropriate for

someone who values an object enough to hide it. But by hiding it in a dresser under shirts and sweaters—a place so suggestive of human warmth and closeness—he is in fact revealing much about himself. The nature of their placement amounts to him telling himself, telling anyone who happens upon them: “The experiences these photos embody matter to me; they are the very core of my being. Therefore to be placed in the most homey compartment of my living quarters.” (Shortly following this sequence we will hear Batty teasingly ask Leon, “Did you get your *precious* photos?”: Leon had obviously been harping on the importance of retrieving them.)

In a cold, threatening world this kind of ostensibly trivial, what we would normally think of as *generic* self-exposure, proves astonishing. In the close-up of Decker leafing through the photos (where we see, and Decker will focus on, a house interior we later recognize in Rachael’s treasured photos), we have moved from a state of safe remove (in the initial long shot) to situating ourselves in near proximity to precious vulnerability. But unlike with the scales, whose discovery is threatening to us because they involve us in an act of self-definition which makes us seem more denatured and cold than human, the photos are threatening because they are disorienting, way out of place. They are evidence that we truly *can*, whether the memories they are supposed to represent are real or not, value the intimate human world they represent. To know that someone thinks like this, could value being open and vulnerable over sure protection, is itself a source of

strength. It presents an option, a way of being, so ludicrous to not be possible yet so wonderfully *is*! Within a drawer of folded clothes, within an apartment, within a building, within a city of endless numbers of buildings, we have found something powerful enough to suggest an eventual unfolding of a macrocosm of a different kind: a humane world of intimate proximity and touch, that could well matter to us, and that may just be within reach.

This is a find well worthy of our search. It is a critical placement in the mise-en-scene of a prop so significant we replicate the actions of the replicant and protect our experience, secure it for future consideration. Thus, as would be the natural reaction to a discovery of something so surprisingly, so suggestive of warmth in a world where we possibly accepted it as something on every wall advertised but nowhere really to be found, we cut to a shot where we are no longer in the apartment. We cut to a shot similar enough to the opening shot of the sequence to suggest—like Decker’s exploration of the drawers—an opening and sealing-off of a discovery. The camera is still; we have a view of the city-environment; and there is a vehicle moving in the frame. However, this time, not tranquil, the scene is instead very tense: We find ourselves in the path of a police vehicle advancing ever larger, ever larger, ever larger *towards us*!

Perhaps surprisingly, this last shot also feels as if in response to our own will. We use our freedom of movement to place ourselves in view of the most threatening image we could imagine and know to provide a good sense of what it

can feel like to exist in this city. Unlike in the first shot, we choose to be grounded at street level, and engage in a long-shot of the environment rather than an extreme long-shot. After asking ourselves, “Can we explore our human need for a warm community, or will this make us feel all too intolerably vulnerable to the dangers in this world?,” we cut to a danger, and see. We ask ourselves, before this menacing encounter, “Will we learn that faith in privacy and self, home, family and friends, is a source of strength to resist the most fear-inspiring experiences we might encounter in this world?”

These are questions that are not settled or answered for us (or for Decker) at film’s end. They are questions that should not ever be quietened by us lest we ignore their importance and relevance in our own post 9 /11 world. We have seen and explored how Decker, Gaff, and the replicants exist in their world, and imagined how we might too: Now how do we choose to exist in our own world? What assumptions do we make of *its* nature? Is our world an inevitably hostile one of hunters and hunted? Or is it something that can be re-made, and thus, potentially, peaceful and humane? What are the consequences of this decision for our own behavior? Do we arm ourselves and hunt, though this means encountering life with the mind-forg’d manacles of polarized thinking? Do we protect ourselves and avoid whatever could make us feel vulnerable, though it would surely also mean narrowing our life experience? Or do we involve ourselves as warm-hearted neighbors, and *help* rather than hunt, *reach out* rather than isolate, even if this puts us in

harm's way? These are explorations we involve ourselves with in our encounter with Scott's creation, and should continue doing long afterwards.

Ridley Scott makes a mistake in telling us that Decker is a replicant because he thereby privileges the certainty of conclusions over the uncertainty in loose inquiry. In a sense, he is mimicking the too knowing Gaff, not inquisitive Decker. Yet *Blade Runner* surely represents the creation of a questing and questioning soul, born of an impulse to reject the kind of closure urged on us by impossible-to-ignore neon signs, in favor of a more open project. Reflected in, and produced by, its choice of camera placement and movement, and in its offering, through close-ups, of three key props for our consideration, the film involves us in a search which presents us with choices, not necessarily with answers. *Blade Runner* really is an existential film; its glory is its uncertainty. Scott rightly eliminated the rosy ending of the initial release from his editor's cut. He should have remained mute as to whether or not Decker is a replicant.

Work Cited

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, Sean Young. 1982. DVD.

Pleasure into Pain, Pain into Pleasure (November 2001)

When I read the critiques of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and John Keats' odes, I feel as if I ought to ask myself if it is actually misleading to identify either of them as Romantic, that is, as possessed of immoderate energy, as moved by a desire to unsettle and change. Mary Shelley, wife of Percy Shelley, daughter—as she told Percy on their first meeting—“of Godwin and Mary [Wollstonecraft]” (37), is *surely* a definitive Romantic writer, isn't she? According to many scholars, perhaps not. Maurice Hindle, for instance, in the introduction to a Penguin Classics' edition of *Frankenstein*, confidently asserts that “its [*Frankenstein's*] moral lesson that pride must have its fall should be obvious to the most indifferent reader” (viii). He sees *Frankenstein* as a first work which evidences her commendable life-long preference for simple “domestic happiness and good friends,” of “moderate and peaceful ambitions” (xlv), not *really* so much out of having herself known loss but out of respect for the “moderate needs of the community” (xxxviii) and disdain for

the “‘sexy’ lure of scientific penetration” (xlvii). The proud, self-absorbed, over-reaching hero appeals to the Romantic spirit, a tale that subjugates him to the argument that it’s best to remain in place—not so much. Hindle accepts as obvious (“[t]here seems little doubt that [—]”) a judgment by P. D. Fleck that *Frankenstein* “contains in an imaginative form her criticism of [Percy] Shelley” (iv; emphasis added). So *that’s* it: Mary’s last name mislead me into expecting her to focus on the Romantic *engagement* with the life of a great but doomed man, when she rightly belongs in my mind’s catalogue of authors and their works with the Classic, with, say, Samuel Johnson and his “Vanity of Human Wishes,” that are primarily interested in *judging* such a life as immoderate. John Keats—now *he* must be a Romantic, for if not, who possibly?—just Bryon and Shelley? But doesn’t Keats *also* provide a similar lesson to Johnson’s “Vanity of Human Wishes”? Keats’ “conclusion” to his “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (50), even if to instruct us as to what we should stick to rather than show what follows from having let ourselves go, still shares with “Vanity” the concern to discourage waywardness. And though some critics dispute the claim that the last two moralizing lines truly represent Keats’ judgment, and though some hold that the last two lines are out of sync with the rest of the poem, for many and perhaps most, it’s all Keats, all the way through. However, from *my own* explorations of *Frankenstein* and “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” I do not dispute that both authors

moralize, nor that this moralizing can seem so obvious to appear the point of their works, but because I consider the central life conflict that between our right to pursue our own dreams—what we owe ourselves—and “the disapproval or condemnation of significant others, such as parents” (Branden 63)—what they think we still owe them—and that the guilt and fear this disapproval causes, because of its source, is overwhelming—to the point that it can still people in place for generations—it is really no surprise that the parents’ (elders’) moralizing voice often dominates these works, can appear *the point* in these works. It should, rather, be expected to, even in works whose overall impetus *is very much still* contest and revolt, and does not by itself disqualify either of them as Romantic. So long as there is a sense that the moralizing voice is present so the writer can engage with it, find a way, perhaps, to triumph over it, the work *is* a Romantic one. And Shelley and Keats *are* fighting, they are resisting parental demands for them to let go their dreams—with both in fact finding some solution to their parents’ claims upon them: Shelley, through embracing the monstrous; Keats, through further immersion into his pain.

From the very beginning of *Frankenstein* there are signs that Shelley is not simply about to *tell* us a moral tale, but rather is *trying on* a moralizing voice, as if looking to resolve feelings of uncertainty towards this voice, its message, while at the same time asking herself if it truly is her own. If we are not too hasty to assume that simply because Shelley is female (and thus cognizant, even at this early age, of the monstrous

sort of over-ambition ostensibly peculiar to the male sex), and because the lesson we think she wants to impart regards the dangers of Promethean-style scientific overreach—still one of our own favorites—we might remind ourselves that this is what we might expect of a nineteen year old, who, through her elopement, her travels and distance from her father, her attempt to start her own family—but most pointedly for the sheer fact of her growing up—is constantly experiencing within herself a disapproving voice as she insecurely and uncertainly, nevertheless perseveres on.

There is something of this ambition in our early description of Frankenstein. Walton tells us first of a broken Frankenstein: “I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart” (26). Shortly thereafter we learn being broken does not exempt Frankenstein from remaining someone of whom it can still be said: “no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature” (28). Walton asks—and I will later consider if it is in fact what constitutes his very “brokenness”—“what quality it is which he possesses, that elevates him so immeasurably above any other person” (28). Then we have a sign (if we haven’t already a couple of them, in knowing him to be so feeling and so elevated), not only that he still has spirit but that he has not learned, not internalized, the lessons he hopes to impart to Walton. Frankenstein tells Walton to:

[p]repare to hear of occurrences which are usually

deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions, which would provoke the laughter of those unacquainted with the ever-various powers of nature;—nor can I doubt but that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed. (28)

And here he stops us short, if more out of befuddlement than wonder, for in the very effort of making his tale credible to Walton Frankenstein shows good reason to doubt the very wisdom he hopes to impart. Note that Frankenstein tells us the experience of the “ever-varied powers of nature” is empowering, enfranchising; he yet still knows what is and what is not possible “in these wild and mysterious regions” (29). More importantly, note that Frankenstein, knowing the magnitude of the tale *he* has to impart, shows signs of struggling with self-doubt, self-castigation, his fears of being ridiculed. Most importantly, we note the similarity of this passage to the one in which he articulates the hubris of thought and demonstrates the sort of self-belief he tells us got him into such dire straights in the first place. When Frankenstein discovers how to create life, he says:

I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same

science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret [. . .]. Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. (51)

In both cases he is offering an account of something important and true but also so hard to believe it strongly credits the person who can actually appreciate it, placing him enviably beyond the rest of man, in fact, and yet still insists on its truth, telling us in both cases *that he can prove it!*

There is another way that by the very means in which he introduces his tale to Walton, Frankenstein offers reasons for doubting, not his sincerity, but the degree to which Shelley, through Frankenstein, is using her work to just simply lay out her own already settled value system. Notice the modesty and respect for critical judgment Frankenstein shows Walton upon surmising that he seeks “for knowledge and wisdom, as [he] [. . .] once did” (28): “I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you; yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale” (29). Notice, too, his concern that Walton deduce his own moral from the tale. It seems clear that Shelley is attempting to make Frankenstein credible through his very respect for the reasoning powers of

man. Yet note the change in Frankenstein when he:

see[s] by [Walton's] [. . .] eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (52)

Frankenstein is now moralizing to Walton, telling him the lesson he *must* take from the tale. I will later discuss why I think for Shelley the very consideration of young Walton's “eagerness of wonder and hope” (52) would summon this crushing declaration by Frankenstein (purportedly for Walton's own good), but for now I will highlight signs of uncertainty in Frankenstein at the very moment he elucidates the moral lesson many critics take to be the obvious moral, *to be the whole point*, of the book.

This lesson, incidentally and importantly, is not what many critics take it to be: despite its appearance, it is as much a spurring for further self-examination and self-exploration as

it is a stop-sign in way of it. Frankenstein does not refer to the dangers of *man's* pride; instead, he refers to the dangers for those who seek to rise above what their own *particular* nature allows. This begs the question: "What, then, is my particular nature—how do *I* rank?" How do we think Shelley, daughter "of Godwin and Mary," thinks she compares with other people? Perhaps we see some indication of it in Walton's description of Frankenstein, whom he places beyond all other men. Certainly Frankenstein, when he discusses "our weak and faulty natures" (28), generalizes about a human condition. But again, this pronouncement is based on what he has learned through extraordinary life experiences; and this pronouncement, as with all those he makes, owing to his insistence in his ability to prove it, evidences an effectual will that clashes with any claim to its ineffectuality. It is difficult for me to believe that Shelley could present us such an extraordinary figure and really think that Frankenstein was deficient, limited. I believe that Shelley, through Frankenstein, is offering us a real sense that this—a desire to be great, coupled with a fear of the consequences of deeming himself so superior—is a source of considerable inner conflict for her. Frankenstein will at times devalue his own worth, but as I have shown there are also times where in bringing the possibility that he is ordinary to the fore, he struggles in making himself seem wholly credible, in convincing us he truly believes what he is arguing.

In the very introduction of the tale, Shelley shows signs she is exploring the possibility that moralizing is a

consequence of self-surrender, of failure. Note that Frankenstein tells Walton that his own tale "may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking, and *console* you in case of failure" (29; emphasis added). Reading this, surely we should ask ourselves whether at some level Shelley is aware that the very act of writing a moral lesson concerning the sad consequence of selfish pride is *exactly* the kind of thing one might do to console yourself if you sensed you'd been compromised. I expect this is why Shelley introduces Frankenstein by attending to his greatness, even though it calls her text's overt moral lesson into question. Shelley is fighting; she is resisting inviting upon herself the self-assessment as a failure she knows would follow from telling a wholly convincing moral tale. This is why she at times resists generalizing about man's nature, having Frankenstein say, "Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (210). At nineteen, and with a childhood and adolescence of a kind I will explore later, she might be asking herself if she might be this "another," this someone else, this exception. Nevertheless, she seems uncertain of life's outcome, and thus consoles herself throughout much of the text—with note, what amounts to a kind of pride—with the idea that "the man who imagines his native town to be the world" (52) is greater than those not similarly enlightened.

Shelley, through Frankenstein, is exploring the self-satisfaction, the self-pride that follows from being a member of a remarkable family—what she has most closely in mind, I

think, when she writes of belonging to a “native town.” Chapter one begins with a statement by Frankenstein of the superior nature of his own parents. He tells us that:

[m]y mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me, are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me. (33)

Frankenstein is likewise conscious of “how peculiarly fortunate [his] [. . .] lot was” (37), and notes that this gratitude—arising from a comparison with those less fortunate as them—“*assisted* the development of filial love” (37; emphasis added). Frankenstein provides an example of this downward comparison when he describes Clerval’s parents for us: “His father was a narrow-minded trader, and

saw idleness and ruin in the aspiration and ambition of his son. Henry [Clerval] deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little; but when he spoke, I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a restrained but firm resolve, not to be chained to the miserable details of commerce.” (44)

We find another example at Justine’s trial, where Justine, Frankenstein’s father, and especially Elizabeth, distinguish themselves as apart from the rest of the town. Frankenstein’s poor regard for his fellow townsmen is clear: “My passionate and indignant appeals were lost upon them. And when I received their cold answers and heard the harsh, unfeeling reasoning of these men, my purposed avowal died away on my lips” (86). It is important that we note that what is especially repugnant about these men is their harshness and lack of feeling, because here too is evidence that Shelley, through Frankenstein, may be confronting feelings of anger, feelings of betrayal, she at some level feels towards her own family.

Justine is not betrayed by her family—but she does suffer *self*-betrayal for confessing to a crime she did not commit. She explains she was besieged by a “confessor” who “threatened and menaced [. . .] until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was” (84). But after confessing, she experiences overwhelming feelings of shame, telling us “[i]n an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable” (84). Elizabeth tries to console her, to give her strength, saying she “will prove [her] [. . .]

innocence” (84), but Justine shakes “her head mournfully” (84) and says:

‘I do not fear to die,’ [. . .] that pang is past. God raises my weakness and gives me courage to endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember me and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to the fate awaiting me. Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of heaven!’ (84)

This surely reminds the reader of Frankenstein’s reply to Walton, when Walton felt “the greatest eagerness [. . .] to ameliorate his [i.e., Frankenstein’s] fate” (29):

‘I thank you,’ he replied, ‘for your sympathy, but it is useless; my fate is nearly fulfilled. I wait but for one event, and then I shall repose in peace. I understand your feeling,’ continued he, perceiving that I wished to interrupt him: ‘but you are mistaken, my friend, if thus you will allow me to name you; nothing can alter my destiny; listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined. (29)

Justine, like Frankenstein, is singled out and faces condemnation, not only from “the public” but from those friends she most values. She asks them: “And do you also believe that I am so very, very wicked? Do you also join with

my enemies to crush me, to condemn me?” (83).

Frankenstein, too, fears his new friend’s judgment, speculating that Clerval might ridicule his own tale if they were in “the tamer scenes of nature” (29). But in Justine’s case, she is innocent—she is no monster, she is only made to feel as if she is. But if the unfairness of her self-conviction is meant to distinguish her from the truly guilty, the truly fallen and monstrous Frankenstein, then why present such strong parallels between these two scenes so that each seems a duplicate of the other, with one featuring a false confession and the other, a true one? Is it means to emphasize Frankenstein’s guilt? Or is it, rather, means for Shelley to explore her own? That is, is she offering herself a variety of versions of a similar experience with judgments of culpability to help her decide whether she deserves to feel guilty, whether virtue lies through accepting or rejecting the guilt, and through which choice—to aim to be good, or accept being bad—will follow the truest freedom?

My own opinion is that Shelley, through a variety of characters and in a variety of scenes throughout the text, is meditating on the difficulties involved in maintaining her own convictions before intimidation from elders—or rather, from a *specific* elder, her father. Acquiescence means suffering disappointment, owing to inconstancy to oneself. We note that Justine’s family is surprised and disappointed that she, unlike courageous Elizabeth, who braves those who’d hem her in, kowtows to public authority. But Shelley surely would not do so; one senses throughout *Frankenstein* such pride in

her family we would expect it to bully through prescriptions from public norms. But Frankenstein and Justine—and thus surely Shelley as well—*are* vulnerable to the opinion of her closest friends and family. And it is when she experiences conflict between her own desires, her own needs, her own beliefs and those of her family's, that Shelley encounters a blasting force that brings to mind considerations of what it might be like to live by the standards of others, to accept their voice, their judgments, as her own. A sad *what if?* she ends up exploring through Frankenstein and Justine.

Justine experiences a moment when she “subscribed to a lie” that lead immediately to misery and self-condemnation. Justine, we note, who was twelve years old when Frankenstein's family took her in, is entering adolescence, is growing up, when her transformation from one with promise to one newly doomed occurs. The precise age is noteworthy because it amounts to, if not further evidence, at least further impetus to consider *as* evidence that the actual moment which dooms and haunts Frankenstein is not when he awakens the monster but rather one much earlier in his life, occurring when he too was entering that stage where he began to see before him “the moment when [he] [. . .] should put them [i.e., benevolent intentions] in practice and make [. . .] [himself] useful to [. . .] [his] fellow beings” (87). He reflects on this moment when—and once again it is important again to pay attention to the wording:

all [became] blasted: instead of that serenity of

conscience which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe.
(87)

Frankenstein's monster experiences a similarly painful transformation after working his way to his climactic meeting with his “friends,” in particular, the fatherly De Lacey. “Finding [himself] [. . .] unsympathised with, [he] wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around [him]” (132). And it seems clear that this is the moment which haunts Frankenstein, and which haunts Shelley herself, a key moment in her life when her hopes were dashed by the lack of sympathy, by the disregard, of fathers.

Frankenstein tells us that when he was thirteen years old, after reading through a volume of books “[a] new light seemed to dawn upon [his] [. . .] mind, and, bounding with joy, [he] [. . .] communicated [his] [. . .] discovery to [his] [. . .] father” (38). Frankenstein notes that “[his] father looked carelessly at the titlepage of [his] [i.e., Frankenstein's] [. . .] book and said, ‘Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash’” (38). Frankenstein tells us that this moment was crucial *only* because, owing to his father's carelessness, he continued to explore studies that would count against him in life. We should not believe him in this, for this is in fact a

remembrance for Shelley's consideration of the crucial moment of Frankenstein's life, and it is a moment which is a certain simulacrum for an experience Shelley had with her own father at the same age (twelve to thirteen). There are several reasons why I believe this is the case. The text itself, independent of any biographical knowledge of Shelley's life, certainly points in this direction, but in addition there are scholars that have explored Shelley's life, have examined Shelley's letters, as well as her father's letters to her, and believe there was a dramatic change in how Shelley's father treated her around this age. And when one keeps Shelley in mind, what was going on, that *had gone on* in her life while reading *Frankenstein*, we cannot miss the similarities between her upbringing and Frankenstein's (and Frankenstein's monster's as well) own. And finally, though Shelley is nearly keen to it without of course any recourse to its like, psychoanalytic explorations of the schism that develops between parents and children when their needs and desires begin to match especially poorly—i.e., during adolescence—show how children almost always end up blaming themselves for the rejection they suffer for pursuing their life goals. Hoping not to tax my reader's patience too much, I will explore each piece of evidence in turn in hopes of offering as powerful, as convincing a case possible, that Shelley's trial of Frankenstein is best understood as a trial of her own self for daring to resist and resent her father's judgments of her.

Throughout the text moments of pleasure are raised and subsequently crushed. It is Walton's (child-like) look of

"wonder" and "hope" and his eagerness "to be informed of the secret with which [Frankenstein] [. . .] is acquainted" (51), that has Frankenstein not only refuse to comply but to commence his lecturing of him. No surprise, this, since Frankenstein once had his own eager hopes similarly crushed, and so is familiar with the perverse allowances allotted the defeated. This moment for Frankenstein was *the* crucial moment life moment for him, the moment where he told himself, "I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul" (155), and proof lies in the nature of the passages where the key word "blasted" appears in the text and in its absence in the passages involving the creation of the monster—that is, at the moment most critics believe where all pleasure actually turned to pain for Frankenstein.

Frankenstein describes this moment as one where "all was blasted" (87). Critics who believe the moment he is obsessing over is his creation of life, attend to how the creature is brought to life by a spark of electricity: they believe this is the scene foreshadowed earlier with the image of an oak tree being "utterly destroyed" by a bolt of lightning. But a lightning bolt that leaves nothing behind but a "*blasted* stump" (40) matches poorly with an awakening by a mere spark of electricity. *But it is*, however, a perfect match for the passage where Frankenstein decides he "should put [benevolent intentions] [. . .] into practice," a decision which follows with him subsequently concluding that "all is blasted" (87). The moment where the lightning bolt blasted the oak was not written to foreshadow Frankenstein's fateful decision

to create life; it was, instead, a description of what it felt like at the very moment of bringing, in the form of a book, his own ambitions, his own path for making a distinctive contribution to the world, to his father for consideration, and having him attend to it with a cursory glance, before dismissing it entirely.

Though two years pass between his writing of his father's dismissal and of how all is blasted, textually, the blasting of the oak follows *immediately* from Frankenstein's description of his father's reaction to his studies. Following learning of his father's disapproval, we hear of Frankenstein encountering a "man of great research in natural philosophy" (40) who ostensibly inspires a complete "overthrow[ing] [. . .] of [the lords of his (i.e., Frankenstein's) imagination which] [. . .] disinclined [him] [. . .] to pursue [his] [. . .] accustomed studies. It seemed to [him] as if nothing would or could ever be known. All that had so long engaged [his] [. . .] attention suddenly grew despicable" (40). He tells us he dismisses every one of the sciences, deciding only mathematics, "being [the only branch of study] built upon secure foundations" (41), worth studying. To inform us of an encounter which lead him to abandon all his studies, all the lords of the imagination of his childhood, only a few passages after telling us that the reason he relates to us the moment of his father's dismissal is because it encouraged him to keep *at* reading, is very odd. He explains the change in course, from eager interest in studies to sudden disavowal of most of them, as result of a last-ditch attempt by a "spirit of preservation" to save him. But

considering that the voice throughout the book that keeps appealing to Frankenstein's better nature, telling him "not [to] [. . .] brood [on] [. . .] thoughts of vengeance [. . .] but with feelings of peace and gentleness, that will heal [. . .] the wounds of our minds" (70), that attempts to dissipate the "gloom which appears to have taken so strong a hold of [. . .] [his] mind" (142), which warns him of the effects of whatever current behavior/inclination—it festers current wounds (70), it "prevents improvement or enjoyment" (88)—this mysterious spirit of preservation, no doubt, is but the already abundant and familiar voice of his father. No, Frankenstein does not continue his childhood studies because his father *failed* to have a notable impact upon him; rather, the impact of his cursory glance could not have had a more reverberating and long-lasting effect on him. Frankenstein persists not *in* spite of his father, but instead *to* spite him, for his "harsh, unfeeling" (86) reaction to his developing interests and hopes for the future.

I believe the reason a fatherly scientist appears in the text soon after the devastating blow to his own (i.e., Frankenstein's) explorations and self-confidence, is that Shelley, imagining a similar confrontation with her own father, must soon engage with the feelings that arose from this near recall of her own experience. I argue mostly through an appeal to common sense, but Shelley *is* clearly aware of the pain involved in attempting to repress feelings: "Even in my own heart I could give no expression to my sensations—they weighed on me with a mountain's weight, and their excess

destroyed my agony beneath them” (144). Frankenstein is enraged by his father’s inattention. It brings to mind one of the few instances where Frankenstein considers the possibility that his father is not perfect, is not right. And it is followed by the introduction into his tale of M. Krempe and M. Waldman, who offer Frankenstein all that his father failed to offer him.

M. Krempe and M. Waldman are not to be imagined devils-in-the-guise-of-angels who lead Frankenstein on into sin. It is important that Shelley establishes that they both share with Frankenstein’s father a preference for thinkers other than Frankenstein’s previous lords of his imagination. What Frankenstein had hoped from his father, supposedly, was merely for him to “take the pains to explain to [him] [. . .] that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded” (38). M. Krempe shares Frankenstein’s father’s belief that his (i.e., Frankenstein’s) studies have been a waste, but *substantiates* Frankenstein’s feeling that his father was still somehow in error. In fact, he makes it a crime:

‘Every minute,’ continued M. Krempe with warmth, ‘every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and useless names. Good God! In what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies which you have so greedily imbibed are a thousand years old and as musty as they are ancient? I

little expected, in this enlightened and scientific age, to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew.’ (45)

We hear here not only an accusation that his father must have been neglectful, but that the native land he came from must have been a desert island. Note, too, that M. Krempe speaks here in a *warm* voice, a marked contrast to Frankenstein’s father’s cold dismissal.

M. Waldman does M. Krempe one better in that “[h]e heard with attention the little narration concerning my studies, and smiled at the names of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that M. Krempe had exhibited” (47). He substantiates the feeling Frankenstein once had as a child that these old philosophers had something significant to offer him: “He said that ‘these were men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge’” (47). He comes across as an ideal father-figure, one who gives lie to Frankenstein’s claim that all he wanted from his father was to show that “the powers of the [these early philosophers] [. . .] were chimerical” (38). Not so: the thirteen-year-old Frankenstein who came to his father with “[a] new light [. . .] dawn[ing] on his mind [. . .] [.] bounding with joy [. . .] [.] [and who] communicated [his] [. . .] discovery to [his] [. . .] father” (38), was hoping for what every child wants—validation for his/her own life pursuits.

M. Waldman appears in the text because at some level Shelley is aware that she was mistreated, was aware she deserved better, and it is no coincidence that in M. Waldman, who is “[h]appy [. . .] to have gained a disciple” (48), Frankenstein has “found a true friend” (49)—or rather, an ideal father-figure—and one who doesn’t *just happen* to show up his own.

It is no accident that Waldman is described as smiling at Frankenstein: Frankenstein’s own father, with a “smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding” him, was Frankenstein’s first recollection of him. But around adolescence Shelley stopped receiving those smiles, and desperately in further need of them, creates for herself M. Waldman. And from Frankenstein’s subsequent description of him, we know we have here a man compared to whom even his own father suffers from steep downward comparison:

His gentleness was never tinged by dogmatism, and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and good nature, that banished every idea of pedantry. In a thousand ways he smoothed for me the path of knowledge, and made the most abstruse enquiries clear and facile to my apprehension. (49)

Buoyed by the love from this good man, Frankenstein will begin to engage in the laboratory experiments that will have him discover the purportedly chimerical ability to create life. Some critics attend to M. Waldman’s declaration that science “penetrate[s] into the recesses of nature, and show

how she works in her hiding-places” (49), and argue it as proof that Shelley herself disapproves of him. But if such a man as M. Waldman is in for a hard time from critics, I am fearful to know whom they would praise, for he is a near ideal father, only one, though we might imagine him, pretend play at having him, most of us still have trouble convincing ourselves we actually deserve.

Shelley, in imagining this perfect father, one far superior to her own, surely felt considerable guilt (sacrilege!), and this explains why she has Frankenstein accuse himself of neglecting his family, saying:

I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: ‘I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected.’ (54)

We note the discord, the inconsistency, between how his father is made to seem here and how Frankenstein described his father at the beginning of the text. His father had been described as someone who was “deeply conscious [. . .] of what [he] [. . .] owed towards [. . .] the being to which they had given life,” and who “fulfilled [his] [. . .] duties towards [. . .] him” (33). With his failure to attend to his son, we have already seen signs of his neglect, and in this passage we have a

father who seems mostly focused on what his son owes him. Frankenstein does not accuse his father of inconstancy, but it is one of things his characters notice as a significant fault in others. The monster says to Frankenstein, for example: “How inconstant are your feelings! [B]ut a moment ago you were moved by my representations and why do you again harden yourself to my complaints?” (142). Elizabeth writes of Justine’s mother that “[t]he poor woman was very vacillating in her repentance. She sometimes begged Justine to forgive her unkindness but much oftener accused her of having caused the deaths of her brothers and sister” (64).

“[W]hen you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us” (33), is not one of the more appealing nuggets of life advice I’ve encountered in literature, and it surely smacks of exactly the kind of moralizing his father ostensibly disapproved of. I think that Shelley is aware of this, is aware that her own father did not practice what he preached, and buoyed by her creation of an ideal father who validates her own needs has Frankenstein doubt his father’s advice: “I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect to vice, or faultiness” (54). But he follows this by informing us he no longer thinks this way:

but I am now convinced that he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquility.

I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (54)

He interrupts himself to offer excuse for what he prefers to see as his moralizing, but which owing to its striking length is best understood as evidence of the profound ripple effect, the profound resulting affect—*shock*—writing Frankenstein’s fathers’ words has upon *Shelley* immediately after writing them. Shelley, through Frankenstein, is attempting to process, make surer sense of the moralizing, commanding tone of Frankenstein’s father—a simulacra of her own—whose immediate effect is but to disturb her so profoundly it shocks her into assuming an older philosophic address. Such sober dressings protect her some from accusation, buy her time to process all that just went on in her fictional re-encounter with her own father, something that requires a significant pause because at some level Shelley is aware that a father who writes

of a child's duties is not likely simply being attendant to the *child's* best interest, but rather more to his own. This is why we encounter here talk in praise of simple, of moderated (read: compromised) pleasures: the pressure to acquiesce, to accept being owned by others' demands and to make it seem for the best, is crushing.

But how much respect is due such a father, really? Shelley, through Frankenstein, has already criticized Clerval's father for attempting to determine his career path. Moreover, we read that Clerval was not a fool to the true nature of his father's intent; instead, he "*deeply felt* his [i.e., Clerval's] misfortune" (44). Fortunately, Clerval possessed a "firm resolve, not to be chained" (44). So Shelley, again through Frankenstein, is not only cognizant of fathers' inclination to dominate their children, she shows she thinks the child who resists the one worthy of salute. Clerval's father saw "idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambition of his son," and this too was worthy of a harsh judgment from Frankenstein: "his father was a narrow-minded trader" (44). Shelley, now imagining for herself a father—Frankenstein's—who, unlike Clerval's trader, comes closer to being a reproduction of her own, is not simply trying to rationalize Frankenstein's father's words. She is also *testing* them, to see if she can permit herself to judge her father in the same way Frankenstein judges Clerval for perpetration of the same crime.

If Shelley let Frankenstein be fully aware of just how wrong his father was to "ascrib[e] [Frankenstein's] [. . .] neglect to vice, or faultiness" (54), she would likely

understand this as weighing toward a harsh critique of her own father as well. She would understand that the reason Clerval *is* behaving heroically while resisting his father, is because this isn't the easiest of things to do, especially in previous eras where "do as you're-told!," not "what color is your parachute?," principally moved the adolescent-parent dynamic. Making such a judgment alienates you from your family; you are not like them, making hopes of claiming your father's love something to be abandoned, once and for all. But if, after praising Clerval for his determination, she has Frankenstein surrender to his father's judgment, this would amount to self-surrender, to capitulation for Shelley, one near obvious to her, which would make every attempt to make it seem all for the best, equally obvious rationalizing. The anxieties arising from her two conflicting desires—to never betray herself, but also to prove her father always in the right—lead to the re-doubling of her effort to wipe out all doubts Frankenstein has towards his father. Thus we read: "My father made no reproach in his letters, and only took notice of my silence by enquiring into my occupations more particularly than before" (54).

When Clerval enters the tale, again we hear Frankenstein maintain that freedom lies in terminating his [i.e., Frankenstein's] explorations: "I hope, I sincerely hope, that all these employments are now at an end, and that I am at length free" (59). But what does such "freedom" open up for Frankenstein? Only the god-awful, it would seem. When Frankenstein returns home, Shelley has Elizabeth "express a

sorrowful delight to see me” (75). He had returned late: “Ah! I wish you had come three months ago, and then you would have found us all joyous and delighted” (75). For the hubris of ignoring his family, for not thinking of his family when he experienced pleasure, *for disobeying his father*, Shelley imagines for him a situation (the death of his brother) that could only substantiate his sense of guilt, his inclination toward self-reproof. But experiencing guilt—a confession to knowing yourself in the wrong—offers no respite, no rescue, for his father chastises his son for his brooding (though Frankenstein describes it as an attempt “to inspire [him] [. . .] with fortitude, and awaken in [him] [. . .] the courage to dispel the dark cloud which brooded over [. . .] [him]” [87]):

‘Do you think, Victor,’ said he, ‘that I do not suffer also? No one could love a child more than I loved your brother’—tears came into his eyes as he spoke—‘but is it not a duty to the survivors that we should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty owed to yourself; for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for society.’ (88)

Yet saintly, “heroic[,] and suffering” (88) Elizabeth was “sad and desponding; she no longer took delight in her ordinary occupations; all pleasure seemed to her sacrilege

toward the dead” (89). Frankenstein will have a tough time finding a way out, for if happy, he is being disrespectful to the newly dead, and if he grieves, he shows immoderacy. He is in fact brought tight-walk-close to the kind of double bind situation where no solution would end up proving available to him, that the psychiatrist R.D. Laing believes is related to the development of schizophrenic symptoms. I suspect this is why Shelley introduces into the tale the consideration that “[t]here was always scope for fear, so long as anything I loved remained behind” (89): Shelley, presenting herself with a facsimile of her own self-conflicted state, is imagining for her own consideration the respite to be found in the most terrible of available solutions—namely, leaving loved ones *permanently* behind by becoming unknown and unlovable.

I mentioned that there are several reasons why I suspect Shelley had once experienced a terrifying moment of parental abandonment that thereafter weighed heavily upon her. I have discussed evidence in the text that Frankenstein, though having difficulty admitting it to himself, was crushed by a sudden change in his father’s reaction to him around the age of thirteen—that is, at the age where he most sought approval for his own chosen life course—which inspired a subsequent effort to individuate anyway, to imagine something better for himself, better father, better surroundings, as well as the very creation of life from knowledge of the kind his father had previously dismissed as a waste of time, but followed by collapsing into self-hatred, by rejoining a family that put him down, and by initiating a

desperate, swirling search for just what it would take for him to be free from the dictates of others'. But before exploring where these desperate imaginings took him, an exploration which follows one of a "serene" moment protected from a "disastrous" future that compares rather well with Keats' own explorations of the same in "Ode to a Grecian Urn," I would like to offer biographical proof that *Frankenstein* is itself such a frozen moment for Shelley, one she is using to help sort out *just what the hell happened?* in adolescence after having known a much less debilitating, and perhaps even mostly pleasing, childhood.

Concerning Shelley's difficulties with her father upon emerging into adulthood, Hill-Miller writes:

Mary Godwin passed through childhood, she satisfied her passionate attachment to William Godwin by living up to his literary expectations, by identifying herself with his hopes for her, and by modeling herself after him [. . .] as [she] [. . .] entered adolescence, William Godwin's aloof demeanor seemed to turn to outright rejection. In fact, the beginning of Mary's adolescence marked a long period of alienation from her father, an alienation that only ended when she married Percy Bysshe Shelley at age nineteen. This parental rejection is central to Mary Shelley and her career: it haunted her all of her life and became emblematic of the many other types of rejection she encountered. It shaped her response

to her burgeoning femininity and gave birth to her vision of the precarious nature of daughter-hood; it provided part of the creative impulse for her first two novels—*Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*—both of which tell the story of the daughter's painful induction into adult womanhood. (31)

She believes that "[a]s Mary Godwin grew older and entered adolescence, her need for emotional support from her father increased" (31). She refers to the work of Nancy Chodorow and "the psychic currents of the oedipal nuclear family" (31) to explain Shelley's rejection by her father, telling us that "[f]rom a father's point of view [. . .] the daughter's passage through adolescence often creates an anxious—and even threatening—moment. As the daughter passes out of the sexual latency of childhood and begins to develop into a mature woman, the father often rejects her. As Lynda Boose explains, the daughter's new physical maturity invites incestuous desire" (31-32).

I admit I look to other theorists for the whys behind paternal rejection (by which I mean, I don't think it owes mostly to incestuous desires), but I find what Hill-Miller has to say about the rejection—that it "meant the end of a childhood full of wide horizons and possibility" (32)—along with her documentation of the sort of distancing from her father Shelley experienced during her adolescence, important to note:

In the spring of 1811, when she [Shelley] was thirteen and a half years old, she was sent away [. . .] in the hope that the sea air would cure her. [. . .] Though Godwin had good medical reason to send Mary away, and though the separation was intended to calm Mary's feelings as well as preserve the peace of the whole household, Mary could not help but read the separation from her father as an abandonment—and an abandonment directly connected to the fact that she was becoming a woman. [. . .] Godwin wrote to his daughter only four times, and failed to visit her for her fourteenth birthday, though he was vacationing in the area. (34)

Shelley experiences distance *from* her father as his rejection *of* her. She is sent away because she is “bad,” because she is growing up, and therefore apart from him. Little wonder, perhaps, that Frankenstein gets up to no good while away at university, for it proves her father was right about her, would work to demonstrate her the repentant who had come to accept the full wisdom of his ways. And little wonder, perhaps, that when Frankenstein leaves for university it is described as something beyond his control: “it [i.e., earlier desires to take his place amongst men] would have been folly to repent” (44), though he was “unwilling to quit the sight of those that remained” (43).

When Shelley returns home “family conflict resumed with a vengeance” (Hill-Miller 34), and she is sent away once

again, this time to Scotland. Hill-Miller's discussion of the implications of this event for Shelley's life, need also be considered:

Mary Godwin's stay in Scotland became the event that marked and engulfed her adolescence. When she wore a new introduction for the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley reflected that she had “lived principally in the country as a girl, and passed a considerable time in Scotland” (*Frankenstein* 223). This description of her early years must have come as a surprise to her father, because Mary principally lived in Godwin's home during her childhood, and she spent time in the country and Scotland only when Godwin sent her there to restore her health and the family peace. The point is that Mary's absences from Godwin's house—absences she read as acts of banishment and paternal rejection—became the events that defined her adolescence, overshadowing all else. (35)

Shelley never forgot her early childhood, but her obsession to make right, to make sense of her own adolescence, so occupied her subsequent attention the constant sorting and re-sorting of memories associated with her adolescence in a search for answers made them the memories most available for recall.

When the sixteen-year-old Mary eloped with Percy

Shelley to the Continent, Godwin was horrified; “[h]e felt robbed of his favorite daughter, cheated of his literary heir, and deprived of the material link to his cherished past with Mary Wollstonecraft” (Hill-Miller 38):

There followed a long period of even more intense estrangement between Godwin and his daughter, an estrangement that formed the specific background against which Mary Shelley conceived and began *Frankenstein*. As Godwin commented in August 1814, before Mary, Percy, and Jane returned from the Continent, ‘Jane has been guilty of indiscretion only [. . .] [.] Mary has been *guilty of a crime*.’ [. . .] Godwin cut himself off from his daughter completely. He refused to communicate with Mary at all and forbade Fanny Imlay to see or talk to her half-sister. Godwin did not write or speak to Mary when she lost her first child in February 1815, or when she bore a son, named William in honor of Godwin himself, on 24 January 1816.” (Hill-Miller 39; emphasis added)

Godwin abandoned Shelley at the moment of the birth of her own son, the same astonishingly cruel act that *Frankenstein* inflicts upon his own creation. This was revenge for Shelley’s crime of self-individuation on the Continent and for creating a family that would claim attention away from him. Mimicking *Frankenstein*, I will insist that I am not telling

falsehoods here. In a letter written to Shelley after her writing *Frankenstein*, and after the death of another child, Godwin belittles Shelley’s mourning and tells her in a truly terrifying passage very reminiscent of the passage in *Frankenstein* where his father instructs Frankenstein to moderate his grief, to “[r]emember, too, that though at first your nearest connections may pity you in this state, yet that, when they see you fixed in selfishness and ill-humour, and regardless of the happiness of everyone else, they will finally cease to love you, and scarcely learn to endure you” (Hill-Miller 48).

She gives us good reason to suspect that *Frankenstein* does not really represent *Percy* Shelley, as critics such as Hindle insist is the case, but rather *Mary* Shelley. Hill-Miller reminds us that Mary was raised by her father to be his son, to be his literary heir:

In the years leading up to her adolescence, Mary Godwin emerged as her father’s potential intellectual heir, the child most suited to carry on his work as a writer and thinker [. . .]. He entertained great hopes for her. He proudly described her to a correspondent as “singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind.” [. . .] As Mary Shelley herself put it many years later, speaking of her father’s expectations for her, “I was nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and good was the precept given me by my father.” [. . .] Young Mary Godwin took her father’s hopes entirely to heart; she learned to

measure herself against her parents and to envision herself inheriting their intellectual legacy. As she wrote a correspondent in 1827, “her greatness of soul [Mary Wollstonecraft’s] & my father[’s] high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those from whom I derived my being [. . .]. [M]y chief merit must always be derived, first from the glory these wonderful beings have shed [around] me, & then for the enthusiasm I have for excellence” (25)

Shelley had an “education and a childhood that in today’s vocabulary might be described as non-gendered—that is, an education that made the least possible differentiation between males and females, that encouraged daughters to develop professional aspirations, and that allowed daughters to envision themselves in many roles, including those reserved for sons” (Hill-Miller 30). She was singled out as singularly great, and evidently still had in mind to evidence her greatness, to demonstrate it to the literary world, well past her writing of *Frankenstein*. Mary aimed to be victorious—Frankenstein’s pride is surely also her own.

And of what results from Frankenstein’s pride, is there any evidence in Mary’s life to shed light on why the monster appears in the novel? Hill-Miller continues:

[But] [t]o say that William Godwin gave his oldest natural daughter the aspiration and training necessary

to make her a writer—that is, all the expectations of literary inheritance and sonship—is not to say that their relationship was always warm and affectionate. Quite the contrary: Godwin was emotionally withdrawn and often cold; he knew, and his children saw, that effusive displays of tender feeling were generally beyond his emotional grasp. [. . .] Mary Shelley eventually attributed her father’s emotional distance to his shyness and to inability to grasp his children’s feelings quickly. (25)

We find here the best evidence for understanding Shelley as creating Frankenstein’s monster to explore her childhood, perhaps to see if her troubles in adolescence owed to something that went wrong earlier, perhaps something she did, or *was*, that made her worthy of being disowned. We recall the monster asking himself, “Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?” (Shelley 117).

We mustn’t be over-hasty, though, to assume the monster as best understood as a *single* entity, because there is evidence for understanding the monster as embodying different identities, different people—sometimes Mary Shelley, sometimes her father—at different times in the text. Note the passage in which the monster chastises Frankenstein, telling him to “[b]e calm I intreat you to hear me” (96), and asking him:

[h]ave I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. [. . .] I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (96-97).

There are similarities between this passage, I think, and a passage from a letter written from Frankenstein’s father to his son:

Come dearest Victor; you alone can console Elizabeth. She weeps continually and accuses herself unjustly as the cause of his death; her words pierce my heart. We are all unhappy, but will not that be an additional motive for you, my son, to return and be our comforter? (70)

Both the father and the monster are making appeals to Frankenstein to satisfy them with a deed only he can accomplish for them. Both explain they are suffering, and hold their suffering as dwarfing the importance of whatever Frankenstein is himself experiencing, the significance of his own concerns, and thus the fatherly appeal to family duties, to common decency, as well as the fatherly address of “Come Victor” and “be calm I entreat you to hear me,” we hear from both father and monster. (The same address, we note, often encountered in Shelley’s father’s letters to her.)

There is psychological evidence for understanding children who believe they possess lords of the imagination somehow actually as friends, and that *do* in a sense in fact possess them (and are not yet so much malignantly possessed *by* them), which *do* function to help them feel protected, safe, and empowered, as coming to experience them as castigating monsters upon adolescence. The psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause informs us that:

[C]hildren usually feel guilty about being traumatized. “I must have been too noisy, because mommy left me” was my sincere belief when my mother left my father. I also believed I deserved my father’s strappings because I wasn’t obedient enough. This is why children set up a separate, internal self as a “protector” to try to stop themselves from ever being noisy, pushy, sexual, demanding, in fact, to stop them from growing and thus re-experiencing trauma. At first, these internal “protectors” are friendly; sometimes they are represented as imaginary playmates or even as protective alters [. . .]. Later, particularly when adolescence brings on opportunities for greater exploration and especially dating [important to note in regards to Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn”], these protective selves become persecutory selves that “have had it” with the host self and actually try to harm it. Their persecutory self says, “It’s not happening to me, it’s happening to her,

and she deserves it! (6)

While Frankenstein's lords of the imagination encourage hubris, the monster reads and contemplates powerful voices that try to caution him away from over-ambition. These include Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, with its moral lessons skimmed from the collapse of once-great empires; Plutarch's *Lives*, which led him "to admire peaceable lawgivers, Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus in preference to Romulus and Theseus" (125); and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which has him reflect that he had "allowed [his] [. . .] thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathising with my feelings and cheering my gloom" (127). Many readers end up sympathizing with the monster and almost to hate Frankenstein: Mightn't this owe to that while the monster attends to voices which tell of his fallibility, Frankenstein listens to those which encourage further ambition? That is, to their also being under orders from old lords of the imagination, gone monster?

DeMause argues that the kind of wounds incurred from being aware at an early age that your parents may often be indifferent to or even actually at some level *hate* you, is ultimately far more severe than what might follow from their physical beatings. Most times, these emotional hurts *never* heal, and end up rattling on throughout your lifetime, for the most part determining its course:

Traumas are defined as injuries to the private self, rather than just painful experiences, since non-painful injuries to the self [. . .] are more traumatic to the self than, say, more painful accidents. Without a well-developed, enduring private self, people feel threatened by all progress, all freedom, all new challenges, and then experience annihilation anxiety, fears that the fragile self is disintegrating, since situations that call for self-assertion trigger memories of [. . .] abandonment. Masterson calls this by the umbrella term "abandonment depressions," beneath which he says, "ride the Six Horsemen of the Psychic Apocalypse: Depression, Panic, Rage, Guilt, Helplessness (hopelessness), and Emptiness (void) [that] wreak havoc across the psychic landscape leaving pain and terror in their wake." Whether the early traumas or rejections were because the [parents] [. . .] were openly abandoning, over-controlling and abusive, clinging, or just threatened by the child's emerging individuation, the results are much the same—the child learns to fear parts of his or her potential self that threatens the disapproval or loss of the [. . .] parent. (7)

I think we see here why Frankenstein rejects (he does this at least a couple of times) the very same philosophers his father so disapproves of, and why, after being subject to constant chiding from his father for their distance, he

eventually leaves university for home.

But returning home, re-merging with the parent, itself has horrible consequences. DeMause tells us that according to Socarides:

fears of growth, individuation, and self assertion that carry threatening feelings of disintegration lead to desires to merge with the omnipotent mother, literally to crawl back into the womb, desires which immediately turn into fears of maternal engulfment, since the merging would involve total loss of the self. When Socarides' patients make moves to individuate—like moving into their own apartment or getting a new job—they have dreams of being swallowed by whirlpools of devoured by monsters. The only salvation from these maternal engulfment wishes/fears is a “flight to external reality from internal reality.” (7)

The need to fly away to an external reality, to flee home, away from internal reality, may be what Frankenstein is doing when he leaves his family to wander through the valleys, and why this sublime landscape, though it “did not remove [his] [. . .] grief, [. . .] subdued and tranquillised it” (93). He tells us as much himself: “Sometimes I could cope with the sullen despair that over-whelmed me; but sometimes the whirlwind passions of my soul drove me to seek, by bodily exercise and by change of place, some relief from my intolerable

sensations” (91).

DeMause describes a patient of Masterson's who should remind us strongly of Frankenstein, of the feelings he felt before and after his act of hubris:

I was walking down the street and suddenly I was engulfed in a feeling of absolute freedom. I could taste it. I knew I was capable of doing whatever I wanted. When I looked at other people, I really saw them without being concerned about how they were looking at me [. . .]. I was just being myself and thought that I had *uncovered the secret of life*: being in touch with your own feelings and expressing them openly with others, not worrying so much about how others felt about you. Then just as suddenly as it came, it disappeared. I panicked and started thinking about the million things I had to do at the studio, of errands I needed to run after work. I began to feel nauseous and started sweating. I headed for my apartment, running most of the way. When I got in, I felt that I had been pursued. By what? Freedom, I guess [or maybe by a monster]. (8)

This moment of total awareness and complete happiness matches well with Frankenstein's own upon discovering the secret of life:

Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life

proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our enquiries. I revolved these circumstances in my mind, and determined thenceforth to apply myself [.] I became acquainted with the science of anatomy [.] I do not ever remember to have trembled [. . .] or to have feared [.] I was led to examine [.] I saw [. . .] the fine form of man [.] I beheld the corruption of death [.] I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret. [. . .] The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture. (55-6)

But after he beholds “the accomplishment of [his] [. . .] toils,” he experiences “an anxiety that almost amounted to agony” (56). And this switch from absolute bliss to absolute

panic and misery is similar to that experienced by Masterson’s patient:

The different accidents are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. (56)

Pleasure arising from an accomplishment that distinguishes him from other people, leads to a flight to external reality.

Shelley, through Frankenstein, is to some extent realizing that addressing her inclination toward self-castigation requires figuring out a way to ignore her father’s commands, not in accepting them, without this amounting to the kind of scornful repudiation we saw Frankenstein and Clerval suffer upon Clerval’s father. This solution, I think, is something she is investigating *via* her vehicle Frankenstein, but *for* herself, because though Frankenstein is eternally damned, damnation blesses him with a wondrous new power. Late in the text,

when Frankenstein is recovering from illness, his doctor, Mr. Kirwin, exclaims “in a rather severe tone”: “I should have thought, young man, that the presence of your father would have been welcome instead of inspiring such violent repugnance” (174). Frankenstein will now tell his father the real reason for his “madness” that previously he’d been unable to share with anyone. His father listens to him, and “with an expression of unbounded wonder,” says, “My dearest Victor, what infatuation is this? My dear son, I entreat you never to make such an assertion again” (180). But Frankenstein does not acquiesce. Instead, he cries out, “I am not mad, [. . .] the sun and the heavens, who have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations” (180). Shelley tells us that “[t]he conclusion of this speech convinced [Frankenstein’s] [. . .] father that [his] [. . .] ideas were deranged, and he [i.e., the father] instantly changed the subject of our conversation” (180). I think this is a replay of Frankenstein’s childhood encounter with his father where his own explorations were belittled as mere nonsense, but this time his father is not right but overhasty, this time he is just plain wrong. And this time Frankenstein does not belittle his beliefs as false imaginings because he knows he is right. It is an encounter between two minds where the father shows himself possessed of the smaller.

Moreover, we have a sense that when the father turns to other subjects, his son is no longer listening to him; a crucial moment has occurred, and Frankenstein is now freed from

his father’s opinions and judgments of him. Shelley has Frankenstein understand that he knows himself better than his father does. Perhaps the significance of this moment is such that the deaths of his family members which soon follow, which now include both Elizabeth and his father, amount to external evidence that he has found a way free of torments—no further need to grapple with them required. Shelley needed to figure out a way in which Frankenstein’s father could still remain good—as it is too painful to imagine him otherwise—and where Frankenstein’s own independence makes him bad—thereby validating Shelley’s father’s judgment of her—but in a way which secretly proves mostly liberating. Shelley finds one in the Blakean assessment of goodness as innocence and badness as corruption through experience. Shelley no longer has Frankenstein listen to his reprimands to be happy, his encouragements to abandon his studies, or his requirement to turn away from happy thoughts towards servicing his family. He heeds no more of his father’s advice, because his father is in a sense the child: his father cannot appreciate the truths accessible to Frankenstein from Frankenstein’s more ranging experiencing of the world. Importantly, his father is still characterized as being well-intentioned; he is still to be distinguished from Clerval’s tyrant of a father. But he *cannot* also be right, because his very goodness precludes this possibility. Frankenstein, who once speculated that man’s “superior [sensibilities] [. . .] to those apparent in the brute [. . .] only renders them more necessary beings” (94), and that “[i]f our impulses were confined to

hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free” (94), has found a way to claim freedom without denying his superior intellectual capacities. For Shelley, I think that this amounts to a refusal to falsely confess the wrongness of her way of thinking.

In Frankenstein’s last conversation with his father, he is attending to other voices. There is no exploration of, no engagement with, his father’s lessons; instead, Frankenstein, mimicking, *claiming* the authority of his father, offers but a short cursory comment: “Such were the lessons of my father” (184). Frankenstein’s mind is on his creation, on his monster. Because he can no longer be reached, is no longer to be understood by man, Frankenstein is alone. This to many critics is the consequence—the punishment—for Frankenstein’s hubris, but it is in fact a state of exclusion, of being, Shelley was struggling toward—not to be apart from man, but to be able to tolerate and appreciate the aloneness of independent thinking. As the psychologist Nathaniel Branden remarks, “We are social animals [. . .] [;] [w]hile it may sometimes be necessary, we do not normally enjoy long periods of being alienated from the thinking and beliefs of those around us, especially those we respect and love. [Thus] [o]ne of the most important forms of heroism is the heroism of consciousness, the heroism of thought: the willingness to tolerate aloneness” (50). We see, through Frankenstein, that Shelley herself finds independence problematic because her father wants her to turn her thoughts to her family—to *him*—when she takes pleasure from her own activity, her own

creations, her own thoughts, or when she attends to those outside the family circle. In imagining herself, through her creation Frankenstein, surrounded by a cloud of melancholy that purportedly makes pleasure impossible to experience, she is exploiting the logic of her father’s commands: that is, whatever it may do to pleasure, mightn’t it leave her free?

But in truth, is Frankenstein really no longer happy? We note that even when he suggests he has become such a vortex of misery that even praise has become but another source of pain, he isn’t much averse to recounting examples of this ostensible, pain-inducing praise. He recounts, for instance:

why, M. Clerval, I assure you he [Frankenstein] has outstript us all. Ay, stare if you please; but it is nevertheless true. A youngster who but a few years ago, believed in Cornelius Agrippa as firmly as in the Gospel, has now set himself at the head of the university and if he is not soon pulled down, we shall all be out of countenance. — Ay, ay, [. . .] Mr. Frankenstein is modest, an excellent quality in a young man. Young men should be diffident of themselves, you know, Mr. Clerval; I was myself when young, but that wears out in a very short time. (66)

Frankenstein would have us believe he experiences little pleasure in, not only such high praise, but high praise from one who does not believe great accomplishments are necessarily also immodest ones.

Frankenstein continues to astonish people until his death. We remember Walton's "astonishment on hearing such a question addressed to [him] [. . .] from a man on the brink of destruction" (24). And though some doubt whether Walton is a trustworthy narrator, I think his assessment of Frankenstein on the mark when he concludes: "Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet, when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures" (28). Shelley, through Frankenstein, has offered herself a sort of self-acceptance for her own consideration, where, though it amounts to internalizing badness, also means to no longer be at war with oneself. It does not amount to stasis; in fact, just the opposite—it offers the potential to change, to evolve, precisely because it helps resolve inhibiting inner-conflicts. Frankenstein is not consistently at peace; he still suffers grief and experiences misery. But as Walton observes, he now has the ability to recover and continue on his way. Yes, I know—Frankenstein *perishes* along the way. But does this represent proof, for Shelley, of the trueness of the moral of the story? Or, having used Frankenstein to achieve for herself a kind of solution, does satisfaction from discovery now replace the energy of the inner-toil that drove the writing of the book, the telling of the tale, making it simply the appropriate time to leave her proxy behind and put down the pen?

Silly consideration? Consider how many people find strange the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* in which, after a

confrontation with God we intuitively felt the book was leading to, Huck is more or less abandoned as the main protagonist as he but passively participates in what really amounts to the further adventures of Tom Sawyer. Both Twain and Shelley were using their characters for their own psychic explorations, and when they create a situation for their protagonists—for themselves—that manifests a "solution," a way out/through, it's time to distance themselves from the creation, either by ending the book or through the insertion of some other protagonist (one who does not so closely resemble themselves) to carry out the remainder of the action. The mind primarily busies itself in its hoarding away of the discovery for subsequent picking-ats and unraveling.

Wendy Steiner, in an introduction to *Frankenstein*, newly released as one of the Modern Library Paperback Classics, believes Frankenstein's polar adventure does not offer Frankenstein transcendence. She argues, instead, that the ending amounts to a critique by Mary Shelley of the sublime:

The sublime takes individuals out of their time and place and lifts them into what Mary Shelley portrays as a deathly, inhuman transcendence. Of course, in Kant and Burke, this liberation from the here and now is the supreme achievement of the imagination, but it is clear that Mary Shelley disagreed. Frankenstein spends most of his time in the Alps or on the polar ice cap, the archetypal landscapes of the

sublime; by contrast the Rhine Valley, where he travels with Henry, is a romantic setting of gentler beauty. “The mountains of Switzerland,” he says, “are more majestic and strange, but there is a charm in the banks of this divine river that I never before saw equalled.” “Charm” is a term that Kant slightly associates with “the agreeable”—meretricious beauty, sentiment, the allure of surfaces. If Frankenstein’s pure taste craves the self-annihilating sublime, Mary Shelley’s belief in “the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue” finds its analogue in the aesthetic of Charm. (xix)

Frankenstein tries to make a firm distinction between the sublime and the picturesque, and perhaps this helped fool Steiner, because “the amiableness of domestic affection” most certainly *does* surface when Frankenstein is in the Alps! Traveling through the valley of Chamounix, Frankenstein observes that though “this valley is more wonderful and sublime, [it is] [. . .] no[t] so beautiful and picturesque, as that of Servox” (91); but of the entire journey of the Alps, including traveling through the “high and snowy mountains [. . .] and beholding the “supreme and magnificent Mont Blanc” (92), Frankenstein tells us:

A tingling log-lost sense of pleasure often came across me during this journey. Some turn in the road, some new object suddenly perceived and recognised,

reminded me of days gone by, and were associated with the light-hearted gaiety of boyhood. The very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal nature bade me weep no more. [. . .] [W]atching the pallid lightnings that played above Mont Blanc, and listening to the rushing of the Arve [,] [. . .] the same lulling sounds acted as a lullaby to my too keen sensations. (92)

Mont Blanc is itself cuddled by the “vast river of ice [which] [. . .] wound among its dependent mountains” (95). I do not believe being reminded of the “light-hearted gaiety of boyhood” is what Steiner is alluding to in her argument that the sublime brings about thoughts of transcendence from the here and now, and I doubt that Shelley could imagine any landscape more soothing, more gentle, than Frankenstein’s description of the Alps allows. It certainly does not seem a deathly or inhuman sort of transcendence either. And indisputably, there is much more a sense of cocooning in this passage than any move toward self-annihilation. No, Shelley is not criticizing the sublime landscape here; and the key word is not “charm” but rather “joy”—joy in nature offering, after travels in *any* region, serenity and fulfillment.

Joy comes in his contemplations of nature, whether the Rhine, the Alps, or a sea of polar ice. About the northern ocean of ice, Frankenstein remarks:

The Greeks wept for joy when they beheld the

Mediterranean from the hills of Asia, and hailed with rapture the boundary of their toils. I did not weep, but I knelt down, and, with a full heart, thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety to the place where I hoped, notwithstanding my adversary's give, to meet and grapple with him. (199)

This thanking of spirits for the chance to grapple with his creation is not evidence of his madness—instead, it is the very real pleasure Frankenstein is capable of feeling now that he has decided he will confront rather than be intimidated by the demands of his confessor. He dies before he has the chance, but the monster gives what amounts to a fair account of Frankenstein's and Shelley's strange but real triumph: "Yet when she died!—nay, then I was not miserable. I had cast off all feeling, subdued all anguish, to riot in the excess of my despair. Evil thenceforth became my good" (212).

Steiner is right, though, to describe "the plot of *Frankenstein* [as] [. . .] a demonic parody of the epiphanic 'spots of time,' in Wordsworth's 'Prelude.' Every episode in the novel is the same trauma, nightmarishly repeated: the loss of a loved one" (xix). Where I differ with him is in believing that the purpose of the repetition is not to draw attention to, to emphasize, the consequences of hubris—to offer the same moral lesson over and over again—but rather to assist Shelley in a search for a solution to a traumatizing abandonment when for her all pleasure turned to pain. The solution is not readily grasped; it requires wide knowledge of the way people

work along with the capacity to accept some unsettling truths. But it is a Romantic one (where "Evil thenceforth became my good" [212]) that rivals the oddity and remarkableness of Keats' own solution to a similar moment in his own life he too cannot but obsess over.

Before arriving at a better solution, Shelley has Frankenstein satisfy himself with moments where "a truce [is] [. . .] established between the present hour and the irresistible, disastrous future" (178). I believe this is the satisfaction Keats experiences from contemplating the urn. I mentioned earlier that the onset of dating often brings about parental rejection. The reason is because dating, like motherhood, means making someone other than your parents the primary focus of your concerns. In *Frankenstein*, the father tells Frankenstein to turn his attention to his family when he experiences self-pleasure, and we learn from Hill-Miller that Shelley's father was greatly displeased with her daughter's decision to elope with Percy Shelley. In "Ode to a Grecian Urn" we have two lovers "frozen" just as they are about to kiss ("[t]hough winning near the goal"[18]). This image is followed by one of townsfolk coming to sacrifice. Together, they constitute a before and after—or more aptly, an if/then: if you choose to embrace, then you can expect to be promptly punished for doing so. By being frozen in time, the lovers are saved, not simply from experiencing their own sure inconstancy in love and the slow effects of aging on young beauty, but from the community's hard judgment that was to follow their rapturous union.

The poem's structure pits the ideals and strivings of youth against the harsh judgments of parents. It begins with the narrator, excited by what he sees on the urn, eagerly asking questions: "What men or gods are these? What maidens loath? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (8-10). He, like Walton in *Frankenstein*, is "by [his] [. . .] eagerness and [. . .] wonder and hope [. . .] express[ing] [. . .] that [he] expect[s] to be informed of the secret with which [the urn is] [. . .] acquainted" (51). We remember Frankenstein refusing to "lead [Walton] [. . .] on to [his] [. . .] destruction and infallible misery" (51-52), his lecturing him on "how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (52). Similarly, the urn, in a sense, attempts to stop the narrator's over-eager and perilous investigations, supposedly "out of friendship," as "a friend to man" (48), moralizing "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50).

These last two lines are as famous as almost any out of Shakespeare. They last out of poetry, but just as much for representing the ongoing human problem of inhibiting parental voices, the power, similar voiced statements in people's own lives had, to still their realizing their full potential. Some critics believe they represent Keats' firmly held conclusions, having arisen from his own investigations of truths for man (Lyon 45). Sidney Colvin says that "amidst the gropings of reason and the flux of things, [truth is beauty,

beauty is truth] is to the poet and artist—at least to one of Keats' temper—an immutable law" (45). Others have an adverse reaction to them, believing they are jolting, poetically awry, or self-evidently false, or the voice of the urn rather than Keats' own. William Wilkinson believes that the "idea of 'truth' [is] [. . .] foisted in with violence" (49), and that it upsets both the beauty and believability of the poem. He proceeds to create a "better" ending where "[b]eauty is joy" (49). H. W. Garrod believes that "every reader [. . .] in some degree feels them, feels a certain uneasiness [in the last two lines]" (60). Royall Snow damns the message: "[t]hat is nonsense and instinctively we feel it. The poem is so well loved precisely because that appeal *is* valid and universal. Though we crave a solution of the questions *transiency* raises in our minds, we scarcely crave *this* solution once its implications become clear" (62). Snow investigates whether it is possible that "Keats never either meant nor made such a statement as 'Beauty is truth?'" (62). He concludes that he did not; the trouble is that the message has been taken out of context. Snow, though, believes there is a consistent single voice encountered throughout the poem. Like F.R. Leavis, he believes "[t]he proposition is strictly in keeping with the attitude concretely embodied in the poem" (78). Others find the riddle solved upon appreciating that they are "uttered by the urn without any interference on the part of the poet" (Lyon 111).

The mere fact that there are a variety of opinions here is refreshing compared with the near absence of mental-

wrestling over whether or not Frankenstein's moralizing statement to Walton is in fact a component of Shelley's own world-view. The best we get there is the suggestion that Shelley's warning, "however reasoned and erudite [...] [...] has sounded timid next to the heroes challenge of Frankensteinian inquiry, and posterity has preferred horror over healing" (Steiner xx). In short, most critics do not explore as they do with Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," whether the moralizing voice is *not* in fact the voice of the writer. However, *neither* work is simply the playing out of a conclusion regarding life either writer has already arrived at. Instead, both are active working-outs of a life experience that afflicts them enough for them to attempt to find a solution *through their writing of the work itself*.

In both works there is the staging of the warring elements—youthful ambition versus parental intimidation. Shelley uses the pursuit of youthful studies to taste success, Keats uses the young lovers to know love. Concerning Keats, Clarence Thorpe concurs:

[T]he symbols executed here, themselves a product of mind and soul, still contain within themselves a dynamic something that has power to kindle the imagination of a sympathetic observer, who [...] is able to re-create the particular bits of life[.] [T]he image [of the young lovers] comes to the mind of Keats in a pleasurable wave of recognition. It is pleasurable because he detects, starting out at him

from the fair chiselled form, waves of intuitive whisperings that seize his imagination and set it aflame[.] (58-59)

I differ from Thorpe in believing that what the "kindl[ing] the imagination" (59) of a sympathetic observer amounts to is a merging *with* the image, not simply being stimulated *by* it, so to become a near participant in the scene, and that the pleasurable wave of recognition is not caught sight of a semblance to one's own experiences, but the result of a more direct re-experiencing of the past.

The critic I am in most sympathy with in regards to its meaning agrees that the poem represents, though disguised, a moment from Keats' own past. Albert Mordell believes that "emotions connected with Fanny Brawne [Keats' former lover] inspired his two most famous odes [...] [including] [...] 'to the Grecian Urn'" (199). "Keats saw a resemblance between himself and that youth. He, too, was winning and near the goal, and he no more had her love than did the youth on the urn. [...] He had to accept his lot and pretend to see some advantage in it as he did in that of the youth on the urn" (205). Compromise owes to his sharing a fate akin to Frankenstein's, when, even when he "appeared almost within grasp of [his] [...] foe, [he had his] [...] hopes [...] suddenly extinguished" (201). Consummation, experience of any moment that would make one truly happy, is often one where pleasure turns into pain. Branden notes that "[he] had the opportunity to work with many thousands of people in a

variety of professional contexts and settings[,] [and] [. . .] is absolutely persuaded that happiness anxiety is one of our most widespread and least understood problems” (91). He continues:

Many people feel they do not deserve happiness, are not entitled to happiness, have no right to the fulfillment of their emotional needs and wants. Often they feel that if they are happy, either their happiness will be taken away from them, or something terrible will happen to counterbalance it, some unspeakable punishment or tragedy. (97)

Branden notes that to stop and reflect on one’s troubles, in an effort to properly identify and resolve them, is unusual, because most people fear that if they ever stop and look inside they may discover “there’s nothing there” (93). Rather than reflect upon and attempt to resolve it, most often when feeling anxious, “[i]n order to make it more bearable, it is commonly converted into specific, tangible fears, which might seem to have some semblance of plausibility of the circumstances of one’s life [but which amount to] [. . .] a smokescreen and defence against an anxiety whose roots lie in the core experience of self” (79). Keats is using the two lovers to engage his past. In this he is already somewhat less the coward than Mordell assesses him as.

It is true, though, that Keats, like Shelley, is imagining what it might feel like if he pretended it true that “Heard

melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter” (11-12). He is trying the rationalization on, just as Shelley is trying on the idea that it is best to live modestly, quietly, amongst friends and family in her native town. Both, though, have too high a self-esteem to long content themselves with compromised offerings, for:

one of the characteristics of high self-esteem is an eagerness for the new and the challenging, for that which will allow an individual to use his or her capacities to the fullest extent—just as a fondness for the familiar, the routine, and the unexacting coupled with a fear of the new and the difficult is a virtually unmistakable indication of low self-esteem. (Branden 90)

We have discussed Shelley’s eventual solution, and we will soon discuss Keats’ own, but first I will offer a brief explanation as to why we should imagine the image of the village sacrifice as *conjoined* to the image of the young lovers, not as separate and distinct from them.

The poem, of course, begins with talk of pursuits, struggles to escape, along with maidens and wild ecstasy. “Who are these coming to the sacrifice?” (31) follows but three lines after “All breathing human passion far above” (28), so they are, more or less, two images which flow into one another. From “Lead’st thou that heifer lowin at the skies” (33), we know that a heifer, a young cow, is to be

sacrificed. The sacrifice of animals in antiquity was actually a change for the better in the history of the barbaric ritual of sacrifice; previously, sacrifices were human, healthy young men and women—representing our most promising selves—more often than not. All we require to understand that the heifer is in fact a metaphor for young lovers, and that the two images are linked for Keats’ consideration of the troubling moments in his past when pleasure turned to pain, is to understand that dating often leads to parental rejection. Children, who initially worship their parents as gods, and imagine their family as all the world, are left alone to contend with the wiles of the world—*are sacrificed*—by their parents, as they begin to focus more on themselves and life beyond the home.

Keats’ “Ode to Melancholy” represents his own Romantic solution to the terror and pain of parental rejection. Rather than acquiesce to parents’ demands, Keats offers a prescription for continuing on in the very teeth of pain, making a poem that begins with “death moths” (6) and “mournful Psyche” (7) rather than with a “flowery tale” (4) and a “wild ecstasy” (10), actually the more uplifting of the two. If all great pleasures turn into piercing pain, if “Joy [. . .] Turn[s] [. . .] to Poison while the bee-mouth sips” (24), there is another option available other than avoiding vivid experience in ostensible preference for “unheard melodies”: keep sipping. To prescribe feeding “deep, deep upon [the] [. . .] peerless eyes” (20) of melancholy amounts in my mind to an admission that “heard” melodies *are* in fact much sweeter

than “unheard” ones, they just come with the bitterest of after-tastes. Same thing, also, with unconsummated love. Keats concludes that it is better to suffer the pain because otherwise “For shade to shade will come too drowsily” (9): our experiences in life will be muted ones. As Morris Dickstein tells us, the “permanence that the [. . .] Grecian urn seemed to offer is forgotten [. . .]. Keats no longer seeks passive dissolution, freedom from the flux and tension of actuality; he dismisses that wish, demands passionate assault on the world of experience, with all its contrary sensations, with all its intimations of mortality” (231).

This is the declaration of a Romantic. In a sense, it is not dissimilar to what Frankenstein’s family had hoped Justine capable of. They believed it better to resist “confessors,” to resist being compliant, for, even if this leads to torture, to “let[ting] her [confessors] rave” (19), in addition to being both good and right it also affords a pleasing sense of self-regard that counts against the pain. Keats is choosing *not* to follow the path of least resistance, which would have him, not drink down terrors, but douse his anxieties with drugs in some effort to turn them off. Instead, he declares he will continue to imbibe them so he might enjoy a rich, resonate life.

John Keats died at an early age, and so we are used to hearing that “[n]o one can read Keats’ poems and letters without an undersense of immense waste of so extraordinary an intellect and genius cut off so early” (Abrams 504). One rarely encounters such regret for Frankenstein, for, for his

hubris of self-attendance and transgressive exploits, he ostensibly deserved no better. But in coming to this conclusion, a conclusion I believe Mary Shelley herself did not subscribe to and was struggling the whole of her life to resist, are we rewarding ourselves with the sense of superiority that comes from being “good” at the expense of the genuine superiority that could follow from our being “bad”? Is it really true that happiness and self-respect lie in never forgetting all our parents are due, in moderating our pleasures in deference to all we have been told we still owe them? Or is this a deception we foist on ourselves, a “truth” we feel we must try to oblige, lest we slip into self-condemnation, self-hatred? Mightn’t it be, that is, that we just failed where others would have succeeded?

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. (general editor). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature Vol. 2*. New York: Norton, 1968. Print.
- Branden, Nathaniel. *Honoring the Self: The Psychology of Confidence and Respect*. Bantam, 1985. Print.
- Damrosch, David (general editor). *The Longman Anthology of British Literature Vol. 2*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1999. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. “Childhood and Cultural Evolution.” *Emotional Life of Nations*. Institute of Psychohistory. Web.
- Dickstein, Morris. *Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971. Print.
- Hill-Miller, Katherine. “My Hideous Progeny”: *Mary Shelley*,

- William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1995. Print.
- Hindle, Maurice. Introduction. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. By Mary Shelley. New York: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- Mordell, Albert. *The Erotic Motive in Literature*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919. Print.
- Lyon, Harvey ed. *Keats’ Well-Read Urn: An Introduction to Literary Method*. New York: Holt, 1958. Print.
- Mellor, Anne. *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. New York: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. New York: Modern Library, 1999. Print.
- Steiner, Wendy. Introduction. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. By Mary Shelley. New York: Modern Library, 1999. Print.

Draining the Amazons' Swamp (March 2002)

Elizabeth Gaskell, in her “Our Society at Cranford,” creates for herself a means of revisiting the maternal matrix from which she emerged, the lengthy gestational period with her mother. As the desire for symbiosis with our mothers, who are “our original primary source[s] of pleasure, security, and identity” (25), is always with us, we experience throughout our lives “a regressive longing to ‘return’ to the maternal matrix” (Koeningsberg 26). At the same time, as fusion with our mothers means the disintegration of our own self-constructed identities as well as feelings of “re-capture” by the “devouring mother [. . .] [.] who destroys at will or retributively” (Rheingold 18), this push to make a return generates subsequent desperate attempts to pull ourselves back out. It *is* a hazardous journey; however, there are ways to make it a less troubling one. Gaskell, for instance, goes on the journey second-hand, *through* a constructed narrator. Further, she brings with her totems of maleness, that is, representations of an other that all mothers carry with them

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

that represent something alien and distinct from themselves. Their male essence acts as a repellent which provides time to re-experience the matrix; but their potency, detached from their manly source (i.e., the outside world), is quickly drained. Gaskell therefore needs to generate successive representations of maleness within her narrative to accomplish the transformation she is attempting to effect. Her goal is nothing less than the replacement of her own internal representation of her mother with one less terrifying, one less threatening to drain her own individuality from her. She is assisted by men, but it is a *heroine's* journey, towards a most valuable prize: after braving such a journey, daring such a feat, she feels entitled and becomes empowered to keep this transitional mother as the one she returns to on subsequent journeys.

Before we begin this, our own journey, which likely threatens to be moving inwards to its own strangely alluring (hopefully) but also menacing “swamp” (hopefully not), to help lure the reader in, I will make some attempt to anticipate sources of apprehension my reader may currently be having. 1) Though I believe that the quality of parental care varies enormously and is more important in determining the adult personality than one's sex, my argument *is* based on a biologically fixed way all mothers react to their differently sexed children. My study is not inspired by the work done on the instability of semantic boundaries; I do believe, though, that contemporary critical approaches to literature such as deconstruction and new historicism provide journeys similar

to the one I will be describing here. Critics set off from an “enlightened” (st)age: they are aware of the instability of meanings and of the multiplicity of selves (a sophisticated state of consciousness denied those they set out to visit). Though they are braving a journey into a matrix they associate with the disintegration of selfhood, they come equipped with theories that enable them to transform their environment. They too are attempting to become heroes: by demonstrating a text’s incoherence and heterogeneousness they leave the text, formally a formidable representation of the literary canon, “de-fanged”—it becomes a less threatening object to play with and return to. 2) I *am* also identifying the narrator with the author. I see the narrator in “Cranford” as the object generated by Gaskell to locate herself within the text; the narrator’s status, whether flattened out within the plural pronoun “we” or strongly individuated within the personal pronoun “I,” serves to both represent Gaskell’s own sense of herself at a particular point of the text and to generate subsequent plot developments. Since the distinction between author and narrator is so often made these days, I accept my reader’s potential disapproval, but also ask for open consideration of this possibility: Perhaps my brazen approach will for some help reinvigorate subsequent revisits to “Cranford.”

The first several paragraphs of the story establish for both the reader and for Gaskell herself that we are about to revisit the maternal home. As children naturally see their mother as vastly more powerful than themselves (she is their

first god, and the inspiration behind all subsequent ones), and with the father (especially in the past, but so often these days too) often either for the most part absent from the home or distant while in the home, the maternal matrix (i.e., home) is a place where the mother is in charge. Cranford, the narrator tells us, “[i]n the first place, [. . .] is in the possession of the Amazons” (3). The Cranford women are described as if they are each best identified by what they share in common: they all “keep [. . .] gardens full of choice flowers” (3); they all “frighten [. . .] away little boys” (3); they all “rush out at geese” (3); they all “decid[e] [. . .] questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments” (3); they all “obtain [. . .] clear and correct knowledge of everybody’s affairs in the parish” (3); they are all “kind [. . .] to the poor” (3); they are all “sufficient” (3). They are all the same. At our entrance into Cranford, into the maternal matrix, we sense immediately that we are in an environment where our individuality, our personhood, may not be secure.

As we crave the love of our mothers, and as an attempt to revisit and reclaim this love motivates our journey, the narrator takes care not to be too critical of the way the mother, so to speak, tends her home. So despite having described the town of Cranford as a swampy place into which men “disappear,” *and* into which goes the Cranford women’s individuality, the narrator assures herself (and us) that “each [of these Amazons] has her own individuality” (3). But she follows his declaration by once again making them seem all

alike. We are told, “good-will reigns among them to a considerable degree” (3). In truth, there is only one distinctive individual who resides in Cranford: the formidable mother-figure, Miss Jenkyns. And she is to be found further, deeper into the story—at its center, rather than along its periphery.

The journey into Cranford is a journey into the past. “Their [i.e., the Cranford women’s] dress is very independent of fashion” (3)—“the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford” (4). Specifically, Gaskell is creating a journey to a past we have all experienced. “Cranford” is a journey to the time in our lives when we were subject “to rules and regulations” (4) of our own mothers. The narrator tells us that it takes but a few days’ stay in Cranford for young people (who are just visiting) to lose their autonomy, their “liberty,” and to internalize Cranford’s “rule[s]” (4). These are the same rules, presumably, they hoped to have left behind them in their becoming adults, but to be within Cranford is to become the child in his/her mother’s domain. It is to re-experience the authority of all that “your mamma has told you” (4), and finding yourself accepting her rule. Acquiescence means that visitors lose their adult sense of autonomy in their speech (“no absorbing subject was ever spoken about” [4]), in movement (“the inhabitants [. . .] clattered home in their patterns” [5]), in time (“the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten” [5]), and in dwelling-place (“baby-house of a dwelling” [5]). In *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture*, Ann Coley argues that “Cranford” is a creation born out of a “yearn[ing] for a

time and place that seems to compensate for and soothe the rough incongruities of the present” (76). I concur; but considering that such shaping and softening means the obliteration of one’s own distinct personality, I think “Cranford” at least as much or more represents Gaskell’s attempt to “undercut the longing for such an idyllic past” (Coley 76)! In fact, if we were not driven by our need, set by our early experiences of our mother as *the* source of love and human warmth, to re-experience this “idyllic” environment, we likely would not attempt the journey.

Our narrator does not stay long in Cranford. Just as she is beginning, with her successive step-by-step itemizing of the particular regressions Cranford commands of her, to slowly acclimatize herself, she pulls herself out: she leaves this space within the text she calls and we think of as Cranford. She withdraws to her starting point, her present existence in the city of Drumble. She is able to do so because she has not well identified herself as being, in the present tense, within the town. Moreover, she has a masculine place to return to. This place, this city, Drumble, is associated with commercialism, modern technology, a quickness in pace and an authoritative judgment of anything not new as of bad taste. It is a masculine Now prepared to ruthlessly shorn itself of its feminine past. She uses a description of Mrs Jamieson as “practic[ing] ‘elegant economy’” (Gaskell 5) to remind herself she is no longer in Cranford. When she repeatedly writes “[e]legant economy!” and reminds herself that she was “fall[ing] back,” of how easy it is to “fall back into the

phraseology of Cranford!" (5), she is startling herself back into her adult mindset with the help of successive exclamations. The narrator is losing herself too readily within the collective pronoun "we" in the text, despite her attempts to sustain the singular "I." She becomes part of the "we" that "kept [. . .] [them]selves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time" (4), despite her earlier attempt to establish the young visitors to Cranford as those who acquiesced to its rules.

At this point in the text the singular pronoun "I" is claimed by the narrator principally while she is outside Cranford, explaining its nature to someone else. For now, within Cranford, "I" is associated with the commanding mother-type who transforms the visiting youth and the narrator into a complicit "we," that is, the one who offers scolding lectures ("I dare say your mamma has told you, my dear, never to [—]" [4]) to them. However, the narrator is merely testing the waters; she knows from the beginning what is required to explore Cranford without so readily disassembling. She needs to bring along "[a] man," a representative of—and one metonymically linked to—the "outside world," who will get "in the way" (3) of the homogenizing forces at work in Cranford.

She creates one. And, after her successive and nearly endless listing of the smothering forces at work in Cranford, she begins her re-entry into Cranford with a successive listing of the masculine attributes of her guardian, Captain Brown, which enables him to resist meekly conforming to Cranford'

laws upon entrance into town. He is described as "brazen" (6), and he is. He speaks openly ("about his being poor" "in the public street!" [5]), "in a loud military voice!" (5). He is "invad[ing] [. . .] their territory" (5). More importantly, he scares them (the women of Cranford) with his "connexion with the obnoxious railroad" (6). He is empowered by his "masculine gender" so that rather than being made to feel like a child, he soon "ma[kes] himself respected in Cranford [. . .] in spite of all resolutions to the contrary" (6).

The narrator likely means for "masculine gender" to mean the male sex, and though he clearly is supposed to represent the exceptional man, it is largely because of Captain Brown's *sex* that he is able to remain distinct while in Cranford. Unlike with their girls, mothers automatically react to their boys as if they are fundamentally different and distinct from themselves. Because of this, girls understand early on that "freedom"—i.e., an identity distinct and separate from their mother—has something to do with being male. As we will explore, freedom can be, not just disorienting but an absolutely terrifying thing, and fear of experiencing freedom is the inspiration for the Cranford women literally scaring away all the (unexceptional) men in town. But to be able to be fully free, that is, to be able to strongly resist capitulating to others in favor of your own growth, is unceasingly alluring. And thus we understand the Cranford ladies' attraction to the exceptional man—to Captain Brown—who can remain undaunted after experiencing their best efforts to either expel him or make him conform to Cranford' law.

Captain Brown, by keeping Cranford's smothering forces in check, makes it safe for the narrator to re-enter the text. She can now revisit her memories with her mother without experiencing an overwhelming sense of regression or a withering away of her autonomy and individuality. He is her agent, and her lead-in: after he triumphantly establishes himself in the town as conqueror of the Amazons, the narrator establishes herself, in the present tense, within Cranford.

While in Cranford Captain Brown serves two primary purposes for the narrator: 1) As he does not take his "appointed" house and instead "take[s] a small house on the outskirts of the town" (7), he thereby provides the narrator with a place to situate herself so that she can be, so to speak, *at* Cranford, but not wholly *within* it. Coley argues that Cranford's rituals, which "soften and smooth out the effects of change," permit Captain Brown (whom she describes as representing "a more modern age or progress" [75]) to "be admitted from the periphery into the center [of Cranford] [. . .] without rupturing its core" (75). I appreciate her focus on the various sorts of textual spaces in Cranford, and might agree that Cranford eventually integrates Captain Brown within its society, but strongly argue that his very purpose for being introduced into Cranford is so that he *can* rupture its core! 2) With his masculine otherness and essence he will help bring the narrator to her goal: a re-encounter with her "mother," and not just with her (i.e., her mother's) immediate environment. As mentioned, he will also, as a representation

of "Death" (Gaskell 6), and through the narrator's sacrifice of him, destroy the authority and potency (a kind of death) of Cranford's town matriarch, Miss Jenkyns.

Captain Brown, this early into Cranford and into the text, is capable of dramatic displays of his manhood, but this soon begins to drain away. We are offered a sense of both who he is (a master) and who he will become (a servant), when he again distinguishes himself from the Cranford crowd at church. "He [Captain Brown] made the responses louder than the clerk—an old man with a piping feeble voice" (8). Soon afterwards the text shows him fluctuating between loud brazenness and inaudible feebleness. Importantly, however, still energized and encouraged by his dominance of the church crowd, he is able to lead the narrator to his one-on-one encounter with Miss Jenkyns.

At a party of Miss Jenkyns, Captain Brown still dominates the Cranford women ("sharp voices lowered at his approach" [9]), but he is beginning to seem more courteous than brazen. Captain Brown, we are told, "immediately and quietly assumed the man's place in the room" (9). However, he still has enough manly impudence to challenge the hostess in her home. Like dueling shamans, they summon their gods for battle: Miss Jenkyns' Dr Johnson versus Captain Brown's Mr Boz. Miss Jenkyns attempts to tame Captain Brown's literary taste, telling him, "I have formed my own style upon it; I recommend it to your favourite" (11). Her friends already consider Miss Jenkyns' "[e]pistolary writing as her *forte*" (11; emphasis in original). However, he rebuffs her by telling her,

"I should be very sorry for him to exchange his style for any such pompous writing" (11). It is a brave confrontation with Cranford's chief "amazon," but also one that required most, if not all, of his adult masculinity. He shows clear signs of regressing to a childlike state while dueling with her. While listening to her, he "screw[s] his lips up, and drummed on the table, but he did not speak" (11), as if a child afraid to confront his mother directly. He asks her a defiant question, but "in a low voice, which [the narrator thinks] Miss Jenkyns could not have heard" (11). And after managing to deliver upon Miss Jenkyns "a personal affront," "he was penitent afterwards, as he showed by going to stand near [her] [. . .] arm-chair, and endeavouring to beguile her" (11). In short, in this scene, where he does act the part of the triumphant shaman, he also plays the part of the sometimes timid, sometimes remorseful, acolyte.

The personal suffering of Captain Brown's kin and his repeated attempts to placate Miss Jenkyns, constitutes much of what immediately succeeds this scene in the text. We hear of Captain Brown's daughter's (Miss Brown's) "lingering, incurable complaint" (13), and as if her condition is linked to Miss Jenkyns' fury at Captain Brown's impudence, we read of Captain Brown trying repeatedly "to make peace with" (13) her. The narrator, as if in response to Captain Brown's loss of "potency" (i.e., his "placidity" [13]), coupled with signs of her own obedience to Miss Jenkyns (she is described as being "bade" [13] by Miss Jenkyns), leaves Cranford for Drumble while still empowered to do so.

The narrator introduces a new source of manly potency into the text to help rejuvenate her sagging Captain Brown—Lord Mauleverer. Lord Mauleverer is a source of energy: he "br[ings] his *lordship* [into the] [. . .] little town" (14; emphasis added). He has come to visit Captain Brown, and brings upon him associations of manly performance "in the 'plumed wars'" and the power to "avert destruction" (14)—just what Captain Brown needs to avoid losing the individuality which had empowered him thus far in Cranford! As formerly with Captain Brown, Lord Mauleverer is described as exciting the town. He, much like Captain Brown, tames the Cranford Amazons, and thereby makes it safe for the narrator to re-enter Cranford. Her next visit is described in such a way to make Cranford seem set for another energized happening: "[t]here had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last" (15). The stage is set, with a newly energized Captain Brown, for the delivery of another powerful blow to their head "prophetess" (14).

Lord Mauleverer does indeed "do something for the man who saved his life": Captain Brown becomes "as happy and cheerful as a prince" (17). Newly energized, Captain Brown is primed to usher in the narrator's coup-de-grace: she uses his newly reinvigorated association with the outside world (his experience in wars and his friendship with lords) to bring in a "nasty [and] [. . .] cruel" (17) train into Cranford to run over him. The train might have been introduced at any time, but is best introduced when it can most readily be associated with him. This is likely only when he seems

energized, as then the train's dramatic entrance is more apt to remind one of his own "invasion" (5) of Cranford. The train could not, however, be introduced at the beginning of the text, because the narrator required time to strongly associate Captain Brown and Miss Jenkyns with one another. With him always placating her, and with her forever piqued at him, the pairing is complete. Further, just as Captain Brown's association with Lord Maulever made him "a prince," Captain Brown's association with Miss Jenkyns incurs upon her his association with death.

We remember that when we first met Captain Brown, his association with the railroad also associated him with death. In this early part of the story, in two sentences, one following the other, these two key words are linked with Captain Brown's own behavior. The text reads, "[along with] his connection with the obnoxious railroad, he was so brazen as to talk of being poor—why, then, indeed, he must be sent to Coventry. Death was as true and as common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud in the streets" (6). Captain Brown brings Death into "Cranford," and it filters into our experience of "Cranford" thereafter.

Death is first characterized as if it is similar to poverty, both being true and common, but a distinction is made between the two terms: Captain Brown loudly speaks of his poverty, but does not speak of death. Why, then, if he himself doesn't, and the Cranford ladies most certainly don't, does the narrator attach this word to Captain Brown, so early into the narrative and brazenly capitalized? It is not simply an apt

comparison to make to help convey how inappropriate his openness about poverty is in Cranford. It serves this purpose, but the selection of death as the particular association to be paired with poverty serves as a clue that to the narrator and to the Cranford women to openly acknowledge one's poverty is to *very specifically* bring about thoughts of death. Therein, in fact, lies the true reason the Cranford women deliberately blind themselves to poverty.

The narrator complains of the Cranford ladies "blinding [themselves] to the vulgar fact that [. . .] [they] were, all of [. . .] [them], people of very moderate means" (6). She offers a reason—a highly suggestive though badly misleading one—for their self-blinding: it is so they are not "prevent[ed] [. . .] from doing anything that they wished" (6). Arguably, the opposite is true: if the Cranford women did not blind themselves and instead permitted themselves to openly acknowledge their poverty, they might take the first step towards increasing their status materially rather than just imaginatively. That is, they might stop compensating for their fallen state and arise through the efforts required to amass material possessions.

Change requiring the altering of habits might lead to personal growth, to self-discovery, to *individuality*, and thus to emergence from the maternal fold. Blindness leads to a static life in which "doing anything [one] [. . .] wish[es]," really amounts to doing much the same as everyone else. The real reason they blind themselves is because, because individuation by a child is so often imagined by the mother as

a rejection of her, if they allowed themselves to individuate it would bring about real feelings of abandonment, of having incurred an intolerable loss. "The perception of loss is not bearable, it cannot be integrated by the ego" (Koenigsberg 10). "The child is so dependent on the mother, [his/her] [. . .] attachment to her so intense, that separation from the mother is experienced to be equivalent to the *death of the self*" (14; emphasis in original). To be blind is to lose individuality, to remain in symbiosis with the mother; but to allow oneself to see is to risk losing oneself altogether. The double-bind women are in explains Captain Brown's possession of totemic powers: because the mother's original conception of the male is as someone different from her, Captain Brown can exist outside the maternal fold (in the realm of death) and still claim the attention of the mother figure. This is, after all, the original way mother and son encounter one another.

Soon we encounter Miss Jenkyns identified with Captain Brown (as a warrior), and thus to death as well. At Captain Brown's funeral, the narrator imagines Miss Jenkyns' bonnet as a helmet (Gaskell 20). However, Miss Jenkyns resists the fate the narrator has in mind for her. She uses the power her own hegemony over Cranford still provides her to attempt to overwhelm the wily narrator who seeks her destruction. Our narrator momentarily *is* in a weak position: she has killed her own guardian, who not only facilitated departure from Cranford but also provided a safe position on the periphery of Cranford in which to locate herself.

And Miss Jenkyns is powerful in her death-knell. She is

described as both commanding and angry (e.g., "Miss Jenkyns declared, in an angry voice" [21]). She reduces the narrator to a child-like state, "c[atching] [her] crying," and making her "afraid lest she would be displeased" (21). Miss Jenkyns insists that Captain Brown's remaining daughter, Miss Jessie, "stay with her," leaving her (i.e., Miss Jessie's) own house "desolate" (21). Contrary to Colley's view, Captain Brown's house is not located on the periphery because it will take time for him to integrate himself within the Cranford community; rather, the periphery is instead the *ideal* position to locate oneself while Cranford's core is under Miss Jenkyns' control. As many new historical and Marxist critics hold as true regarding the societies they study, the best space to develop one's own voice in Cranford is along the periphery, where the hegemonic hold of the dominant power is least certain.

Now lacking a conception of Cranford as having a secure periphery in which to ground some opposition to its potent center, the narrator is helplessly being drawn into its core and is showing signs of losing her self-command. Her "adulthood" is being drained from her as she loses her established means of resisting Miss Jenkyns—so we hear that she "durst not refuse to go where Miss Jenkyns asked" (22). However, Miss Jenkyns *has* suffered a mortal wound she cannot recover from. The narrator, by introducing a representative of powerful manliness into Cranford, and by imagining a way to sustain him until his identity could become intertwined with Miss Jenkyns, is able to bring the destructive powers of a train straight to the heart of Cranford.

The power that sustains Miss Jenkyns, her maternal world of Cranford, is pit against the powers of the exterior world, and it is no contest: track and train master swamp. In fact, the power of (what is in effect) the Industrial Revolution to overwhelm Cranford owes to the Victorian need to conceive of an external reality in this way.

That is, in order to assist their escape of the maternal matrix, they had to imagine that a distinct, tasking “outside world” exists which compels them to leave our homes—to make it seem that in fact there is no choice in the matter! Because they create a world that compels them away, they can imagine their mothers as being less likely to interpret their departure as a deliberate rejection of her. The result of creating a world in which leaving their mothers and the family home behind them is the harshest demand a modernizing world makes of its citizens, as something that should inspire no guilt, as it was not up to them, is that nostalgic revisits to the family home still seem available. Industrial society, then, though deemed something they *had* to adjust to, as something which ravaged a less abrasive, more peaceful and natural way of life, was in fact a construct Victorians wanted, that they needed and themselves created, to help youth, to help themselves, tame an entrapping home life so to partake in some individuality-enabling freedom.

However, since they need to revisit this past, they can make their return easier if they can avoid, as much as possible, re-experiencing the traumas associated with childhood. It is often overwhelming and therefore unhelpful

to recall traumatizing experiences with significant verisimilitude. Instead, it is better to revisit these experiences transformed. Transform actual experiences into fiction (so they are not “real”), and means to reshape or replace memories becomes facilitated. I am arguing that this is what Gaskell is up to when she strips Miss Jenkyns of her potency: she is readying her for a replacement—Miss Jessie. By bringing to the fore a formidable Miss Jenkyns, she primes memories of her own mother when she seemed most powerful and controlling. Then, with these memories drawn out, she supplants their association with authority—which prevents their being tampered with—with instead, depletion and exhaustion. The net effect is that, unconsciously, she can feel empowered to effect a permanent transformation of her own memories, making them less scary, and therefore better suited for future revisits.

Miss Jenkyns is not killed at the end of “Cranford”; she is instead weakened and then replaced by Captain Brown’s daughter, Miss Jessie. But a weakened and defeated Miss Jenkyns can no longer set the tone for the rest of the town. The Cranford ladies now orbit around Miss Jessie, who has a strong sense of self-possession. “[H]er house, her husband, her dress, and her looks” (23) all draw praise from them. Miss Jenkyns is “old and feeble” (23-24), and her reign is effectively over. To help ensure this end, Gaskell introduces Major Gordon into the text. Major Gordon is a young military man associated with freedom of movement and with much grander distances and locals than even Captain Brown.

Major Gordon, who “had been travelling to the east”(23), will now apparently reside *within* Cranford. With Major Gordon in place in Cranford, Gaskell lodges a potent male presence that will reside not only in this fictional creation but likely also within her own memories of her childhood alongside her mother. She is creating an empowered father figure both to accompany her own memories of her mother and to oppose them.

With the Cranford ladies now depicted as reading Dickens rather than Johnson, there is a sense that the narrator leaves Cranford much different than it had been upon her entrance: no longer will its inhabitants be amazons who scare away men and restrict women’s individuality. Now that our heroine has freed them from smothering taboos, next time young visitors go to Cranford perhaps they’ll bring with them some “commerce and trade” (4), and afford the Cranford women some new fangled ways of living and being.

We, of course, have been attempting our own heroic journey. I hope that our visit to an example of nineteenth-century Victorian literature leaves it tampered for bold new explorations. I imagine those interested in nostalgia in Victorian and Edwardian England may now have, if they wish to explore it, evidence that nostalgia is best understood as a longing for our mothers’ love, not a past society’s. They may also have a new hypothesis to test: Is it possible that nostalgic revisits are better understood as expeditions involving potentially brave encounters with primal fears than as the sort of thing indulged in only by those who cannot face the

everyday hazards of the real world? If so, and so long as it unconsciously moves their readers to face and perhaps ease old traumas, is novel reading potentially both nurturing and progressive, the vehicle, perhaps, of personal and social advance, *over* any other sort of literature? If ostensibly light, genial stories like “Our Society at Cranford” indeed did trump the work of serious essayists such as Newman and Mill in the service of good, it’s so far passed our notice more than any train into “Cranford” could possibly have—but it may nevertheless have been the way of it.

Works Cited

- Colley, Anne C. *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture*. London: St. Martin’s Press, 1998. Print.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cranford*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Koenigsberg, Richard A. *Symbiosis and Separation: Towards a Psychology of Culture*. New York: The Library of Art and Social Science, 1989. Print.
- Rheingold, Joseph C. *The Mother Anxiety, and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*. Boston: Little Brown, 1967. Print.

Jo's March (March 2002)

According to object-relations theorists, even after leaving the maternal matrix and achieving autonomy, the desire to revisit home and merge with the mother never leaves us. The mother and her home ever-promises “the immediate and effortless gratification of one’s desires” (Koenigsberg 35). However, after childhood, home has ambivalent and conflicting associations because it is also associated with the “loss of one’s power, the loss of one’s capacity to grow and develop. The idealized drama of oneness is, in actuality, a manifestation of a dependent, infantile attachment [. . .] which oppresses the self as it reaches toward its own powers” (38). The desire to revisit her own past, to recall memories of her own closeness to her mother and also shore up her independence from her, likely motivated Alcott to create *Little Women*, for the text is a revisitation to the long gestational period with the mother in the home and recapitulates a strategy that enabled a “little woman”—Jo Marsh—to individuate and become an adult. As females

DRAINING THE AMAZON’S SWAMP

begin life with an initial estimation of the mother as someone similar to them, Jo individuates from her mother through successive internalizations of alien—of male—“objects,” which culminate with her imagining herself as distinct and separate from her.

At the end of the chapter “Jo meets Apollyon,” we find Jo asking her mother to help “contain her,” to prevent her “from flying out” (Alcott 81). Jo pleads for her mother’s help so she can become as close a replica of her (i.e., her mother) as possible. This is at least a plausible and even a likely reading of Jo’s saying, “If I’m ever half as good as you, I shall be satisfied” (80). But aware that a child can come to see her mother as an obstacle to his/her individuation, we know to pay particular attention to what her mother says to prompt this reply. Mrs. March says to Jo that “the love, respect, and confidence of my children [is] [. . .] the sweetest reward [she] [. . .] could receive for [her] [. . .] efforts to be the woman [*she*] [. . .] *would have them copy*” (80; emphasis added). Attending to the word “copy,” and appreciative of the child’s fears that too close an attachment to the mother means a kind of “death of self,” we are more inclined to take what Jo says *literally*: that is, we understand Jo to mean here she would be satisfied to have her mother influence half, *and only half*, of her identity. The other half, her “bosom enemy” (80), the one her mother fears and hopes to contain, she’ll use to become enough the heavyweight that she could remain grounded and yet still prove too much to handle.

A too strong and too complete an attachment to the

mother figure is represented in *Little Women* by Jo's sister, Beth. Beth, unlike Jo, who has this "temper" (80), is a perfectly "good girl." Alcott describes Beth as one of a cohort who are "shy and quiet," "who sit [. . .] in corners till needed," and who "live [. . .] for others so cheerfully" (39) they almost go unnoticed. Beth, as a homebody, as someone content to remain at home, "too bashful to go to school" (38), is the text's best representation of death of the self. Beth's easy acceptance of "blessings already possessed" (44), opposes Jo's tendency to "do something very splendid" (38), and best exemplifies Mrs. March's moral doctrine. It is no accident, then, that Alcott writes Beth's death into the text, for to exist as Beth does, perpetually cloistered, fearful, and accepting of her lot, is to not really be living. She has a persona—but a static one. She is a girl, but hardly even a little woman. Her character, as with her fate—despite the text's praise for the many Beths in the world—is presented as something to be avoided at all costs. However, as Beth "unconsciously exercised more influence than anyone [else] in the family" (41), we know that Jo desperately has need of influences *outside* the family if she is to resist becoming, like Beth, too strongly identified with her mother's home.

As at the end of *Little Women* Jo has her own school, with its boys, as well as her own brood of "a family of six or seven boys spring[ing] up like mushrooms" (484), she is clearly associated with fecundity, not with death. This is an appropriate representation of her because she successfully manages what Beth never attempts, and what the other

March girls manage less completely: she distinguishes and detaches herself from her mother. This ending, with Jo as "matriarch" of Plumfield, with its "wilderness of boys" (484) ("poor boys as well as rich" [484]), which is also "just the place for boys (the house is big [many-roomed])" [482]), is prefigured in her interaction with her mother at the beginning of the book.

The book's first chapter, "Playing Pilgrims," shows the March girls encircling their mother in her chair by the fire, attending to her reading of their father's letter. This is the scene featured on many covers of *Little Women*, and may be the image that comes to her mind when Katherine Fullerton Gerould complains that "[t]here is [all] too much love-making" (500) in the book. The tendency may be, however, to emphasize the inner world of the March women in this scene and forget to attend to the outside world embodied in the father's letter to them. That is, we may tend to focus on the feminine aspects at the expense of the masculine, which would be a mistake, because this scene felicitously captures how Jo understands her childhood, and it is from denaturing *both* the masculine and feminine spheres in this scene that inspiration for the rest of the plot can be found.

According to the psychoanalyst Stanley Greenspan, "children can classify their emotions and emotionally relevant relationships far earlier than they can physical objects. For example, they know members of their families from those who are not members, classifying the family as a unit" (35). The family, though, as the child has spent most of his/her

time interacting with and focused on the mother, is embodied in her, and thus the first conception of “other,” the first alien or outsider, is one normally understood as part of the domestic circle—the father. This chapter presents us with the qualities the March girls initially, and thus also strongly, associate with “motherhood,” or femininity, as well as the qualities they associate with either “fatherhood,” or masculinity. The mother represents symbiosis—the close attachment to Mrs. March by the fire. The father represents individuation (he writes from a long distance away), risky self-exertion (he is “at war,” and is associated with “marches” [Alcott 8]), and self-discipline (he mentions his love for them “only at the end” [8] of the letter). Further, the text not only tells us what her father explicitly writes to his daughters about, but through what it keeps mum, the girls also learn to associate the father with “dangers faced” and “homesickness conquered” (8). (We note, too, that the March girls’ father commands their mother’s attention [later in the text he is explicitly characterized as someone Mrs. March “obeys” (80)].) Jo understands, then, that the road to individuation, to her own “Celestial City,” is to become as much like her father as she can manage. She will attempt, therefore, to inculcate a copy of her father inside herself—i.e., she will internalize sources of his real maleness so she can gradually replace her temporary and inferior way of distinguishing herself from her mother: clothing herself in a tom-boy persona.

True, these girls are not infants; they presumably have a past understanding of their father as someone living within

the home. But as I believe the rest of the text shows that the initial impression we receive of the March mother and father is the template for Jo’s individuation, and as the text makes the beginning of *Little Women* also the beginning of each of the March girl’s subsequent “Pilgrim’s Progress,” my argument is that it is best to understand this initial impression of the father as the one Alcott carries with her as she develops the journeys of the girls’.

With a reference to a “true Celestial City” (10), the first chapter ends with Mrs. March offering advice Jo chooses to misinterpret. Mrs. March says, “[n]ow my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before father comes home” (10). Mrs. March often speaks of each of her children’s Pilgrim’s Progress as if it is a journey they must undertake alone, but the second chapter, “Merry Christmas,” has her accompanying them (in earnest) on an encounter with the outside world. It is in opposition to this, to her mother’s own path, with its clearly limited and delimited association with the world outside the home, that Jo undertakes to see how far on she *can* in fact get.

Mrs. March takes the children on a “maternal inquiry” (7) to tend to a poor starving German family. Mrs. March’s interaction with the outside world—the only instance of it we are offered a substantive look at (outside of her interaction with her daughters in their own homes, that is)—is associated, then, with back streets (taken so as to remain unseen), poverty (“a poor, bare, miserable room” [15] for a

house), a mother and her girls (i.e., no boys or men), as well as a giving away of their Christmas dinner (15). Mrs. March's dictum that it is better "to enjoy the blessings already possessed, and [to] try to deserve them, lest they should be taken away entirely [. . .] instead of increased" (44), is subverted in the text because her own attempt to deserve blessings leads precisely to a *decrease*, a *taking away* of their precious Christmas dinner. Jo is given early on in the text a representative example of what the real ends of this "old woman's advice" (44) are. This contradiction between Mrs. March's moral lessons and their results—between her fiction and reality—is actually quite a gift: it helps Jo imagine a way of relating to the outside world which distinguishes her from her mother. And so, at the end of chapter two, we find Jo wanting to know more about the grandson of Mr. Laurence—their next-door neighbor, with the "big house" (21). This is Laurie, the boy who helped procure for the March family a very nice Christmas dinner after all.

Before exploring how Laurie is the first of a succession of males that Jo encounters, defeats, and grows from, with the aid once again of Stanley Greenspan I will briefly emphasize the significance for children of their initial associations of quantities of time (such as "soon" and "a long time"), distance (such as "next-door" and "faraway"), and size (such as "small" and "big"), with both the mother and the father and their respective environments. According to Greenspan, "[w]hether positive or negative, nearly all of children's early affects involve the persons on whom they

depend on so completely for their very survival. [. . .] As [children] [. . .] grow and further explore their world, emotions help them comprehend even what appear to be physical and mathematical relationships [i.e., time and distance]" (19). He continues: "Mathematicians and physicists may manipulate abstruse symbols representing space, time, and quantity, but they first understood these entities as [. . .] children" (20). Greenspan would have us attend very closely to children's early experience of variations in time, distance, and size, especially as they relate to children's experience with their parents and their homes, as they will serve as the foundation for experiencing the world as they grow up. For our purposes, he helps us imagine *how* Jo conceives *what* is required to see herself as an adult.

In the letter to his family, Jo's father acknowledges that for a child "a year seems very long to wait before [he] [. . .] see[s] them" (Alcott 8). Jo therefore has as an early feeling associated with things she wants (i.e., the return of her father): obtaining them involves an extension of time that *feels* overlong. Further, the anticipation of "a nice long letter" (8) from father and his strange world of "camp life, marches, and military news" (8), likely makes her father's world seem as distant as an imaginary Celestial City (or, rather, a City of Destruction) would be to the March girls. Even within their own home, in which they replicate a journey from a City of Destruction to a Celestial City, they must "travel through the house from the cellar [. . .] up, up, to the house-top" (9). Jo's early psyche, then, is set to understand the distance from

where she is—firmly within the maternal matrix—to where she wants to be—securely established outside of it—as requiring a succession of stages, each greater than the other (“up, up”), which takes time to unfold and involves movement to faraway places.

Laurie represents the first step of Jo’s journey of individuation. He is but a boy, he lives just next door, and he is readily understood—appreciatively, yet still diminishingly—by her mother “as looking like a young gentleman” (22). So Mrs. March, thinking him harmless and “lik[ing] his manners” (22), encourages her girls to go visit him. However, Laurie, though not seen as a threat by Mrs. March, is still identified by “one of the girls” as being remote (he is “shut up when he isn’t riding or walking” [21]): he turned down an invite by the March girls to a party, and seemed little interested in speaking to them (21). At least to the March girls, Laurie, though a boy, still represents an other from the outside they have been unable to assimilate within their familiar world—he is somewhat frightening to them. Jo recognizes Laurie as possessing some of this male otherness (his remoteness, his restraint), and therefore aims to distinguish herself from her timid siblings (and the maternal home) by bridging the gap that currently exists between them. That is, she aims to transform Laurie, the-stranger-on-the-other-side-of-the-fence, into Laurie, the-friendly-next-door-neighbor.

Jo is already the only March sister who has managed to even talk to him. She says they “talked capitally,” but only “over the fence” (21). Not having engaged with him face to

face, Laurie still represents a challenge, even to brave Jo. In fact, when they do meet face to face, the encounter at first surprises her, and it takes a short while before she feels “at her ease” (27). Jo is described as “stor[ing] [. . .] up” (28) what Laurie says, and of taking in how he looks so she can best “describe him to the girls, for they had no brothers, very few male cousins, and [thus] boys were almost unknown creatures to them” (29). The result of Jo, in effect, ingesting him, so as to better describe him to her sisters, is that her sisters get some sense of Laurie’s strange maleness *from her*. Within Jo’s being, then, she comes to possess some of his masculinity. And as her intake of maleness involves risking a conversation with a male stranger, it also has about it a sense of realness vastly different from and superior to her self-constructed tomboy and theatrical masks. Further, Jo’s dispensing of this masculineness into the March home recalls the Marsh girls’ eager anticipation of their father’s letter, with her, in this instance, playing the part of the letter. That is, while only the carrier, the vehicle for the message—and therefore not yet the source of the male voice—she is no longer simply just one of the girls receiving it second-hand through her mother (’s voice).

Making claim to Laurie is more than child’s play, as there is more to him than his simply being a rather well-mannered little gentleman. Rather, as Laurie “thrashe[s]” (28) boys, and as he has been to faraway places, such as Switzerland and Paris, and aims to live just as faraway (“in Italy [. . .] to enjoy [himself] [. . .] in [his] [. . .] own way” [29]), Laurie has about

him some of the associations Jo has of her father's civil war environment (its soldiers, and—even though Laurie lives just next door—its distance from home). He also seems to have, because he is a male, the latent ability to traverse long distances—the same ability Jo is denied, not simply because she is a girl, but because of what being a girl comes to be associated with inside the March family home. We might expect, then, that if Jo comes to possess some of Laurie's power—his male essence, if you will—two things would likely follow: 1) we would expect Jo to be then capable of attempting even bolder encounters with older, more formidable men; and 2) we would expect a depiction of Laurie as if he were depleted of his masculine energy, *and* as if it were the result of Jo's own doing, at some subsequent point in the text. And both of these developments do in fact occur, as they come to know each other as friends.

Though Mrs. March is quite comfortable with Laurie, she is not so much so with his grandfather, Mr. Laurence. Mrs. March preaches to her girls that they be content with what they have—which clearly means the plain and unassuming—while Mr. Laurence is the rich neighbor with the big house. She describes him, further, as an “odd old gentleman” (21). Moreover, though Mrs. March encouraged her girls to give away their dinner, she is well pleased with Mr. Laurence's gift to the March family of a plentiful Christmas dinner. The text draws attention to how the girls react upon caught first sight of it. We are told “they stared first at the table and then at their mother, who looked as if she enjoyed it

immensely” (21). *They notice that*, despite their mother saying the dinner remained because she “could not refuse” (21) it, she finds herself, despite herself, grateful and pleased before it. The feast is described as being as unfamiliar to the March household as boys are, with “anything so fine as this [. . .] unheard of since the departed days of plenty” (20). Mr. Laurence, then, is someone embodying a large extension of time (with his old age), faraway distances in time (reminding them, with his provision of a Christmas dinner, of their past), and a position of power over Mrs. March: he represents a stronger sense of maleness, a closer representation to Jo of her own father, and is therefore the logical next figure for her to overcome on her own preferred pilgrim's progress.

Laurie is himself overcome by Jo when she attempts something he seems scared of: a confrontation with Mr. Laurence, while Mr. Laurence is on rampage. Before Jo's own confrontation with Mr. Laurence, when Jo, in reference to meeting Mr. Laurence, declares she is “not afraid of anything,” we are told that Laurie “privately thought she would have good reason to be a trifle afraid of the old gentleman, if she met him in some of his moods” (51). Jo admits to herself that she is “a little bit afraid of him” (52); and, as with Jo's initial face-to-face encounter with Laurie, when she finally meets his grandfather, she *is* caught off-guard. Looking at a portrait of Mr. Laurence, and attempting to convince herself, as she had before with Laurie, that there are grounds for expecting their encounter to be a pleasant one, she comments, “He isn't as handsome as *my* Mr.

Laurence, but I like him" (52). Mr. Laurence overhears her and challenges her by asking, "So you're not afraid of me, hey?" (53). The text shows her alarmed at first, but also as eventually finding herself more at ease (with him) (53). Jo has successfully met Mr. Laurence and begun to make of him, a friend: shortly after just having met him, Mr. Laurence tells her to "go on being neighbourly" (53).

The gap between Jo and her sisters has grown larger. Mr. Laurence, after all, is the master of the Laurence household, known previously to the March girls as the one who "keeps his grandson shut up when he isn't riding or walking his tutor, and makes him study dreadful hard" (21). Jo not only is in possession of a greater story to tell her sisters ("she imagined herself telling the story at home" [54]), she is also directly responsible, by bridging the gap between the two families, for the March family going "visiting in a body [.] [with each finding] [. . .] something very attractive in the big house on the other side of the hedge" (55), and indirectly responsible for Mr. Laurence's gift of his grand piano to Beth. Laurie was partially responsible for the provisioning of the Christmas dinner, and Jo, as if drawing upon his essence but making more of it, becomes associated with a greater gift to the March household than even that. Jo the messenger is becoming Jo the provider.

Jo will soon attempt the encounter that Laurie fears—to confront his father "in one of his moods," and the text characterizes Laurie as slowly being drained of his masculinity. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser notes that "Laurie's

inclusion in the female circle, 'The Busy Bee Society,' has apparently feminized him" (52), with "Jo even teach[ing] him to knit" (52). And it is of course Jo who introduces Laurie into the March's feminine world. Laurie is described as "play[ing the part of] lord of the manor" (59), just as Jo once played the part of Roderigo. While Laurie "is always playing truant, and running over to [play with] the Marches" (59), Jo is increasingly associated with Mr. Laurence. She is described as "brows[ing] over the new library voraciously and [as] convuls[ing] the old gentleman with her criticisms" (59). Laurie, under the influence of Beth, resolves to sacrifice his ambitions. He says, "I'll let my castle go, and stay with the dear old gentleman while he needs me" (146). Jo, on the other hand, as if in possession of Laurie's now lost fighting spirit—and as if the direct result of her absorption of Mr. Laurence's "tremendous will" (53) while under his influence—is ready to confront Mr. Laurence while in one "of his moods" (53).

This important encounter follows Laurie's telling Jo of how he was "shaken" (211) by his grandfather, and of the reason for the abuse. The text, in showing how she manipulates this information from him, draws attention to Jo's power over him. Jo "knew how to manage him" (211); and Jo, unlike Laurie, whose plan is to "slip off" (212), garners the courage to confront this very angry Mr. Laurence. It *is* an unnerving encounter for her. Mr. Laurence is described as "look[ing] so alarming, and [speaking] [. . .] so sharply, that Jo would have gladly run away if she could [but]

he stood at the foot, a lion in the path, so she had to stay and brave it out" (214). He yells, "You hussy, how dare you talk in that way?" (215). He threatens again to "thrash [Laurie] with [his] [. . .] own hands" (214); but though "[t]he threat sounded awful [,] [it] [. . .] did not alarm Jo" (214). Jo knows now that she not only has the ability to "shield him [Laurie]" (214) but to successfully "attack" Mr. Laurence. Jo, in fact, wins the day (216), through blunt truth: she tells him that Laurie will run away if he doesn't ease up. After her encounter, Laurie, amazed, exclaims, "[w]hat a good fellow you are, Jo!," and asks, "[d]id you get blown up?" (216).

Jo has managed what Laurie could not, and her stature as a "fellow," her increasing association with and integration of maleness, is becoming more and more real. This encounter, so close to the end of the first part of *Little Women*, serves as its climax. As we shall explore, Mr. Laurence is increasingly depicted as both kind and harmless, as if all his will and ferocity were drained in his loss to Jo. Jo, on the other hand, has finally "got [. . .] by the lions" (57) in the path to her "Palace Beautiful" (57). At the end of part one, we witness Jo's, from having realized a goal presaged much earlier in the text, having grown a great deal in the absence of her father.

Not long into part two we encounter Jo, even within her own home, capable of a powerful isolation, of "falling into a vortex" (265) while writing. She is described here in much the same way Laurie and Mr. Laurence were while still alien to the March family. Specifically, the way her family reacts to her mimics, with their meekness and with their interest, the way

Jo chose to initiate her climactic encounter with Mr. Laurence. Indeed, her family is described "during these periods [. . .] [as] ke[eping] their distance, merely popping in their heads, and when her cap "was drawn low upon the forehead," they "dare[d not] address [her]" (265). The narrative tone is mock-serious, but is better understood as at least half-serious: Jo's writing is no joke—it is soon to become a source of substantial provisioning for the March family.

Soon Jo "electrifies" (268) her family with the presentation of the check she received for being a prizewinner. Owing to her possession of a skill associated with manly genius, she is becoming a major contributor to the family income—i.e., she is already a kind of father for the March family. At this point in the novel, however, the father has returned, and he informs her she has further yet to travel. He tells her to "[a]im at the highest" (268). Jo, though, through her successful management and inculcation of those nearest her, has already grown significantly, and soon sets out to complete her individuation from the maternal home: she sets forth to obtain for herself someone who closely resembles her own father.

Opposite to the sort of transformation, this growth in prowess, we see in Jo, Mr. Laurence is increasingly depicted as a kind old man. Mr. Laurence, having lost his ferocity, now seems feeble and harmless. He is depicted at the beginning of part two as "shrugg[ing] and smil[ing]" (253), and as having to "settle [. . .] himself in his easy-chair to rest, after the

excitement of the morning" (253). He has become the antiquated old man associated with days of old (implicit in his early association with Samuel Johnson's "The Rambler"), while Jo is now ready to embrace the new world (also implicit in her being associated with Dickens and his "Pickwick Papers"). Her next journey will be the last one she will need to undertake. New York is for her the apex of her journey; it is the Celestial city wherein she meets Mr. Bhaer.

Jo has traveled far on her journey toward independence; the text tells us that the result of her labors—her prize-winning story—"had seemed to open a way which might, after long travelling, and much up-hill work lead to this delightful *chateau en Espagne*" (345). And, as the narrator wonders "whether [it was the result of] the study of Shakespeare, or the natural instinct of a woman for what was honest, brave and strong," Jo goes beyond creating imaginary heroes (perhaps an accurate characterization of Jo's retrospective estimation of both Laurie and Mr. Laurence) to "discovering a live hero" (350). The text is now referring to Jo as a woman, not as a *little* woman. And her intellect is no longer playfully—that is, essentially disingenuously—identified as "genius."

Instead, Jo's intelligence is given right due, as it draws her to Bhaer's own striking intellect. Bhaer tends to young children in this, for him, foreign locale: he employs himself as a teacher while in New York. Though he seems "homely" (351) in America, he was an "honored Professor in Berlin" (351), "esteemed for learning and integrity in his native city"

(351). Here is a man, then, who is away from home, who is deemed a heroic-figure in his homeland, but who assumes in America a more modest role as a teacher of young children, and who approximates her father's own age at the time of his writing his letter to his girls: he is made to seem just like the March-family father as he was portrayed at the beginning of the text. Their father, we remember, was initially described as someone "too old to be draughted" (8), and as one who, though treated by his wife and children as almost divine while at home, chose to serve as a chaplain, tending to the needs of young men on civil war battlefields.

As was the case with Laurie and Mr. Laurence, the text draws attention to a gap between Jo and Bhaer she must find a way to bridge. With Laurie, the gap was his apparent refusal to either talk to or associate with the March girls; with Mr. Laurence, it was his formidable temper; and with Bhaer—as he represents her future husband—it is his age. Jo tells her mother that since "[Bhaer's] most forty [. . .] [,] it's no harm" (334). She makes their age difference a reason to become more familiar with him. Any of the other March girls would see Bhaer's age and his unmarried status sufficient to declare him a potential source of danger, and thus someone to be kept at a distance. But as we saw with Laurie and Mr. Laurence, Jo is one to make friends out of strangers. She does this by taking what she knows of them and managing this knowledge so it serves to legitimize and spur on their acquaintance. The only difference here is that Bhaer becomes her lover, not her friend; and this outcome is foretold in Jo's

initial description of him to her mother.

Jo is turning twenty-five and believes she has nothing to show for it. The narrator corrects her, saying, “Jo was mistaken in that, there was a good deal to show” (440). Jo believes she will be a spinster; but this too is an indication, not of the bleakness of her upcoming future but rather that she is now ready to realize her goal. She had internalized early on (from her study of her father) that a goal is reached just after feeling overlong, perhaps never to occur. At this point in the novel, Jo has in several aspects mimicked her father as he seemed to her in the letter he sent. He was far away; she has gone to live in New York. He was associated with battlefields; she braves an encounter with Mr. Dashwood at the “Weekly Volcano” office—and this office, which publishes nothing “but thrilling tales” (349), also reminds us of her father’s “camp life, marches, and military news” (8). Of course, her father “said little of the dangers faced, and the hardships endured” (8), but his reticence then, for fear of unnerving his family, surely worked to firm up any sense they would have of him as being involved in dangerous but still wondrous war environments. For her purposes, her age is not helpful in helping her determine her appropriateness for someone like Bhaer. The key determinant is how well she resembles, how well she approximates, the sense of her father she carries before her.

When Jo brings Bhaer home, she introduces him with “a face and tone of such irrepressible pride and pleasure [. . .] that she might well have blown a trumpet and opened the

door with a flourish” (451)—that is, *very appropriately*, as Jo, with Bhaer at her side, is close to her long-sought triumph. Mrs March believes Bhaer is certainly a “good” man, but her husband sees him as more—that he is “wise” (454). Superficially, this is not meant to be a struggle between them but more concurrence—but it is actually, for the text had previously articulated the clash for us, indicating that “if greatness is what a wise man has defined it to be [. . .] then [Jo’s] friend [. . .] Bhaer was not good, but great” (353). Mr. March ascribes him as the highest sort of man, as a man like himself, actually—and therefore as someone Mrs. March is almost instructed to interact with in a worshipful, obedient manner, and come to think of as no less than her husband’s equal. While Laurie was sporting, but a boy; while Mr. Laurence formidable, but an old man; Bhaer is not only “good, but great” (353). He is a “kindred spirit” (451) to Mr. March: he fully embodies the early sense Jo has of her father.

Jo’s acquisition of father-Marsh-seeming Mr. Bhaer enables her to seem, not so much her mother’s daughter, someone sprouted *from her*, but instead, a rival *from the outside*—and one competent enough to challenge and even displace her. But to effectively mount this transgression, this challenge (Mrs. March, we remember, is depicted as controlling the children’s access to their father, i.e., she reads her father’s letter to them), required a journey. Bhaer is the man she needed to possess all along to fully individuate from her mother, but which, to be felt as a liberating acquisition, as if finally having reached the Celestial City, required a long

drawn-out journey, broken into several stages. Soon she absorbs even Bhaer within herself, as he merges into the Plumfield estate Jo inherits. And as with all others in her path, while Jo shows signs of an increase in her status and power from her intake, Bhaer shows signs of having lost much of his own to her. In Bhaer's case, he deflates: at first his pronounced cosmopolitan identity and great intellect were emphasized (he was a professor from Berlin), but later he is rounded out by his possessing Germanic pride and his loving folk songs—as becoming in his own sort of soft way, country and common.

To many readers and scholars, the key regression in status at the end the novel is that incurred upon *Jo*, not to anyone else. In marrying Bhaer, she shifts away from being a successful writer in New York, backs away from her life's greatest accomplishment. However, Ann Murphy is one who believes Jo's marriage to Bhaer represents a kind of triumphant subversive challenge to the world. She says, "[i]n marrying Professor Bhaer, and hence committing herself to her work rather than to romantic love, Jo creates anew possibilities for herself as a member of a community and as a profession in her own right. [. . .] Jo March achieves full professional existence—[though] at the apparent cost of literary expression [. . .]—through her marriage to her father-professor" (569).

Murphy also believes that Jo's marriage is a triumph over her (Jo's) own mother. *That* she triumphs is clear when we compare Jo's fate to Meg's. Meg represents the "journey"

"empowered" by selflessness; Jo represents selfish full individuation from her mother. Meg's passivity leads to a marriage which takes her out of the family home but which leaves her a marginal figure who "disappears completely from sight in the text," living "in a home so minuscule it is hard to imagine adult human beings living in it" (571). Jo, on the other hand, through sheer boldness and her continuous association with and possession of properties opposite her mother's, best manages to "individuat[e] fully [. . .] while enmeshed in Marmee's loving, coercive socializing, maternal bonds" (575). Jo, unlike Meg, is most visible at the end of the text, both dramatically, in creating the story lines (with her presiding over a boy's school) for the next series of books, and spatially, in inhabiting the grandest mansion. From her continuous association with boys and men, with the affluent and the large, and with her engagement with the masculine world outside her home, she has distinguished herself from her mother's world of girls, poverty, and back-alleyway visits to one-roomed homes. Further, Jo has superseded her mother: Jo, at novel's end, becomes the matriarch young children will have to contend with and attempt to individuate from.

Murphy summarizes *Little Women's* attractiveness to generations of young women readers as owing to it "not merely [offering] a quest for ethical development [. . .] but a narrative of subjectivity that must accommodate both the active seduction of maternal oneness and the compelling desire for separation" (575). She sees *Little Women*, therefore,

because it addresses a problem that is not historically isolated but rather fixed out of the fact of our being human, as of timeless relevance. She draws critical inspiration from such notable Freudians as Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, who attend to the “pre-Oedipal phase at the process of psychosexual differentiation” (Showalter 258) and know to focus on the role of the mother “as the primary [. . .] fulcrum of the private and public” for the March children. Inspired by different theorists, I hope to have offered a reading of *Little Women* inspired by a similar vein of thought, but one not as yet as richly mined. Specifically, I hope to have shown how *Little Women* brings to the fore a strong impression of two different worlds—the private home, associated with the mother, and the public world, associated with the father—and how this initial, powerful impression of the distinctiveness and separateness of these two worlds (especially in their felt spatial and temporal aspects) supplies means on out of the maternal fold. In my view, Jo does so through an enlargement of her sense of self, thereby establishing herself as her own “Mother Bhaer” (485). This may have been Alcott’s own story, or it may have remained her dream. Either way, the sheer fact of so many successive generations of appreciative readers, makes clear that it was not hers alone.

Works Cited

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. New York: Penguin, 1989. Print.

- Cheever, Susan. Introduction. *Little Women*. By Louisa May Alcott. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. xi-xv. Print.
- Gerould, Katherine Fullerton. Afterword. *Little Women*. By Louisa May Alcott. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 498-501. Print.
- Greenspan, Stanley. *The Growth of the Mind: And the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997. Print.
- Keyser, Elizabeth Lennox. *Little Women: A Family Romance*. New York: Twayne, 1999. Print.
- Koenigsberg, Richard A. *Symbiosis and Separation: Towards a Psychology of Culture*. New York: The Library of Art and Social Science, 1989. Print.
- Murphy, Ann B. “The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in Little Women.” *Signs* 31 (1990): 562-85. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine. “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness.” *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. Print.
- Stonely, Peter. “The fashionable world displayed.” *Studies in American Fiction* 27 (1999): 21-36. Print.

Critical Movements (March 2002)

Sir Philip Sidney refers to *Utopia* as a “perfect way of patterning a Commonwealth” (117), which might easily be understood as a reference to Sir Thomas More’s exploration of *Utopia*’s utopia—that is, to book two of *Utopia*. It is, after all, in book two where More, through his character Raphael Hythloday, unfolds for his created courtly listeners the nature of this ideal commonwealth, Utopia. But Sidney does not limit his attention in his *Defence* solely to fine examples of *works* of poesy. Sidney, in making a defence for embattled poesy, argues the importance of attending both to poesy’s audience *and* to poesy’s “maker,” the poet, in evaluations of a work’s poetic worth. From our own acquaintance with Sidney’s several examples in the *Defence* that depict the intertwined involvement of the poet with his poesy and with his public, we know that not one of these three elements should be removed in favor of attending to any of them in isolation. Therefore, knowing that Sidney refers to the “whole Commonwealth” (117) as the particular audience he has in

mind for More’s work, with our “erected wit” (Sidney 109), we do not misconstrue *Utopia*’s first book as of secondary importance for our evaluation. The gentlemen in book one are, after all, debating the plausibility of “correcting errors” (7) in their “own cities, nations, [. . .] and kingdoms” (7). Still, we leave ourselves with two possible avenues of investigation, which lead to opposite conclusions. If, falling prey to our “infected will” (Sidney 109), we make the mistake of following our initial impulse and focus on the second book, we judge *Utopia* as not fully satisfying Sidney’s requirements for poesy, for we cannot imagine ourselves being moved to imitate Utopians or their commonwealth. However, assuming Sidney’s *Defence* works to “move [. . .] us to do that which we know” (Sidney 123), with both books in mind, we find More very well practices what Sidney preaches: he creates in *Utopia* a work which could very well improve a whole commonwealth.

Before exploring the basis for our investigation of *Utopia*—what Sidney believes a poetic work to be—we must first acknowledge that the relationship between the poet and his/her audience is not entirely absent as an interest from book two of *Utopia*. Admittedly, a teller—Raphael, as well as More’s created courtly listeners, are in a sense “there” throughout, but only emerge as the text’s primary subjects at the end of the work. Compared to the bulk of what constitutes book two, and compared with what book one provides, we are offered but a snippet of them. This snippet of Raphael and, in particular, his listener, *the character* Thomas

More engaging with each other, is indeed worth notice, but considering what mostly constitutes book two, we may only know *to* take notice if we have not misconceived book one as merely introduction, and thus of lesser import. Something similar can be said of Sidney's work: if we give scant attention to how Sidney begins his *Defence of Poesy*, perhaps imagining it as simply a device to persuade the reader to explore further on, we are likely to fail to attend well to Sidney's John Pietro Pugliano. If we are guilty of this sin, we are however surely punished for it, for we would miss discovering how this key example of Sidney's helps unlock the real worth of *Utopia* as a poetic work.

Sidney both directly and indirectly tells us what poesy does, and what it is, several times in the text, usually in combination with attempts to distinguish poesy from two other disciplines, philosophy and history. In the midst of his argument where he promotes poets over philosophers, Sidney tells us that "the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book" (123), and that "in nature we know it is well to do well, and what is well and what is evil" (123). Because learned men already know what the philosopher aims to teach, since poesy works *to move* "learned men [. . .] to do that which [they] [. . .] know, or to be moved with desire to know" (123), Sidney deems poesy superior to philosophy. Poesy moves men. To Sidney, that is what poesy *does*.

In his refutation of the philosopher's claim of superiority to the poet, Sidney also indirectly suggests what poesy *is*—

that is, what it is about poesy that makes it move men—by drawing attention to the manner in which philosophers moralize. He presents us with a "perfect picture" (Sidney 116) of moral philosophers stepping forward to challenge him, "rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory" (113). As Sidney claims that poesy is superior to philosophy because it would "win the goal" (116) through general precept *and* particular example, if we turn to the second book of *Utopia* with the details of this image of moral philosophers in our minds, we believe that Sidney's striking image of the particular philosopher inhibits us from learning from More's "general notion" (Sidney 116) (i.e., the overall conception) of Utopian moral philosophy.

More tells us that Utopian moral philosophy is not disdainful of pleasure, even of sensual pleasure (56). They (the Utopians) in fact "think it is crazy for a man to despise beauty of form" (56). However, Sidney's example of moral philosophers, because it excites our senses and creates a lasting memory for us to draw upon, conflicts with and ultimately overwhelms the impression this "fact" has upon us. His example, in fact, draws out details which complicate any easy assuming that Utopians are best understood as enjoying, rather than as being barely tolerant of, sensual pleasures. For example, we notice that More introduces the section on moral philosophy by telling us how Utopians are "amazed at the foolishness of any man who considers himself a nobler fellow because he wears clothing of a specially fine

wool" (48), wherein we hear echoes of Sidney's poorly clothed philosophers, criticizing glory. Further, though we are told that Utopians take pleasure in outward things, we are now primed to attend to the things they take little visual pleasure from, such as gold and silver, and little olfactory or gustatory pleasure from, such as food or drink. Since they take such pleasure in music, the privileged portal must be their ears—but still also their eyes, for though they ignore the glitter of precious metals, they do yet marvel at the stars (48). But again, another of Sidney's perfect pictures springs to mind and intrudes in our reading of the text: Sidney has us imagining them as foolish philosophers so busy admiring the stars and attending to celestial music that they "might fall into a ditch" (113)!

True, it may be argued that it is misleading to focus on Sidney's ridicule of those who do, after all, "by knowledge [seek] [. . .] to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body" (Sidney 113), when, referring to "the most barbarous and simple Indians" (105), he scornfully refers to *these* "Indians" needing "to find a pleasure in the exercise of the mind" (105) lest "their hard dull wits [are never] softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of Poetry" (105). In Utopia, so the argument goes, since we also have "Indians" but who "[o]f all the different pleasures [. . .] seek mostly those of the mind" (More 55), surely considering Sidney's disparaging remarks concerning "Indians" in the *Defence* we are likely to attend foremost to this discrepancy between Sidney's "fact" and More's "fiction" while formulating our impression of the

Utopians. Exactly: we both attend to and wonder at this curiosity, and, as we will soon expand upon, not being children, we believe ourselves unmoved by it. Instead, Sidney's image of the simply clothed priggish philosophers, because of its humorous exaggeration of a selection of characteristics *we*, being of a time when philosophers have "fallen" (103) "from almost the highest estimation of learning" (Sidney 103), might already be inclined to associate with philosophers, changes how we encounter the Utopians: we impose a clear and vivid counter-image on the one we composed from More's descriptions, which makes them seem at least as prudish and absent-minded as aesthetically and practical minded. The result is that they seem less worthy of our emulation, and our conception of *Utopia* as a poetic work is lessened.

Sidney offers another definition of poesy when he attempts to demonstrate poesy's superiority to history. Here he does so through the use of a precept: poesy does not do what history does. History's fashioners—historians—are "inquisitive of novelties [,] [which makes them] [. . .] a wonder to young folks" (114). So alerted, when we turn to More's example of a utopia we note that each section has therein a particular novelty intended to both attract our attention and inspire our wonder. Within the section "Their Work Habits," we learn that they devote only six hours each day to work (38)! Within the section titled "Social and Business Relations," we learn that men at market take what they want without payment (41-42)! Within the section

“Travel and Trade in Utopia,” we learn that “anyone who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission [. . .] is severely punished” (45)! Within the section on gold and silver, we learn that these metals have such little value (“which other nations give up with as much agony as if they were being disemboweled” [47]) that Utopians’ chamber pots are all made from these materials! And within the section on marriage customs, we learn that brides-to-be are shown unclothed to their grooms to ensure happily married couples! This utopia does a number of things Sidney believes good poesy does and that history does not do. It is set in a contemporaneous time (114). It is obviously not limited in conception to what “*was*” or even what is (120). It does offer us an example of a “house well in model” (116)—that is, a well thought out and thorough presentation of a harmonious society for our consideration and critique. But learning from Sidney to attend to how we react to novelties which might capture a child-like mind, it is difficult for us to imagine ourselves as inspired enough to either create a better world (be moved to do) or to learn more about the Utopians (be moved with desire to know) after our encounter with More’s fictional commonwealth.

However, our evaluation of how well *Utopia* conforms to what Sidney believes poesy is, and how it works, should not be influenced by *our own* reaction to More’s work. Further, we ought to take care not to judge ourselves unmoved simply because we think *we think* we haven’t been—i.e., there may be discord between what we know (gnosis) and how we actually

behave (praxis). We will now both explain and explore the importance of these two self-administered checks on our initial rush to judgment, towards a way of seeing *Utopia* as serving rather well as a poetic work.

Sidney does not believe that a work can be judged poetic before considering its effect on its intended audience, and we, though learned, are not the particular audience Sidney has in mind when he praises More’s work. Admittedly, Sidney does give some support for a conception of poesy which assumes that a certain reaction necessarily follows from experiencing a work of art. He uses the authority of Aristotle and his judgment of poesy as concerned “with the universal consideration” (119), to help augment the persuasiveness of his argument. However, he also takes care to tell us that, according to Aristotle, “the universal weighs what is said or done” (119), which, though literally meaning that everything said or done is evaluated against a constant truth, at least implies the well-reasoned state of mind of the poet who notes the inconstancies he sees and hears about him. Such a mind is Sidney’s, who we see refer to the effect poesy has on learned men, and hear warn of the effects of bad poesy—specifically, bare, unimproved history—has on uninformed, inexperienced listeners. Sidney understands that what moves a learned man would likely bore a child, and vice-versa. Sidney teaches us that a judgment of a work as poesy necessarily involves keeping the audience in mind; no art stands on merit alone.

Indeed, we, as readers of the *Defence*, knowing its

examples and arguments, should not be so unlearned as to focus our attention on *Utopia's* second book. Instead, we attend to Sidney's reference to *Utopia* in the *Defence*, note that Sidney praises More for fashioning a work which would aid the learned man best placed to shape a commonwealth, and know to judge *Utopia* an example of poesy on its ability to move such a man to get to work accomplishing it. We are well directed, then, to consider book one of *Utopia* in making our assessment, since influence at court constitutes its primary interest.

We must acknowledge that Sidney does not refer to *Utopia* as a good example of poesy with which to influence a prince; rather, he says it is a good example with which to inspire a "whole Commonwealth" (117). However, in *Utopia*, when More (through his character More) says that for Raphael to maximize his influence he should aim to serve a prince, we have a characterization of a prince which should influence our reading of Sidney's intended meaning here. More says, "a people's welfare and misery flows in a stream from their prince, as from a never-failing spring" (8). He defines the prince as the source of societal destruction and of reconstruction. Sidney, both naturally as an Elizabethan courtier, and by example with his attempt to promote poesy as the sovereign discipline—unless we assume that Sidney is radical enough to imagine the poet capable of bypassing the king and transforming a commonwealth through a direct appeal to the people—shows that he shares More's conception of the prince as key to any reinvigoration of a

commonwealth. Since the prince has advisors to inform his judgment on, for example, matters of policy, we believe the advisor to a prince the particular audience Sidney has in mind when he praises *Utopia*. If the more radical alternative seems too tempting to leave unexplored, to help weaken its appeal, we refer our reader to Sidney's praise for poesy's ability to "beautify" (121) historians' recitations of "counsel, policy, or war stratagem" (121), wherein we hear of both counsel and policy in a passage about the good service of advisers to princes. Of course, Raphael doubts some aspects of More's characterization of the prince. For instance, he thinks a prince is best understood as someone who makes wars, not commonwealths (8), which, if we believe his accounting of princes over More's own, might have us imagine a prince as completely uninterested in *Utopia*. Such a prince might find something in the Utopians' war stratagems that interests and even inspires, but this sort of inspiration leads to the destruction of commonwealths, not their reconstruction. Raphael, though, never calls into question the actual power of a prince. His disagreement with More concerns the *disposition* of the prince, and therefore also the effectiveness of virtuous advisers at court, a subject we will soon discuss.

Sidney offers an example of an encounter between a would-be poet trying to affect a learned man—Sidney himself—in the *Defence*; in fact, it serves as his introduction to the work. In the exordium, Sidney tells us of his encounter with John Pietro Pugliano, of Pugliano's attempt to "enrich" (102) Sidney's mind as to the greatness of his (Pugliano's)

placement as equerry at Emperor Maximilian II's court. From attending to Sidney's reaction to Pugliano, we note that the learned man is well aware of man's tendency to enjoy self-flattery, of the length of time a teller takes in telling his tale, and of the possible relation of teller to listener as one of master to servant (102). Guilty of telling a drawn-out tale intended to promote himself and demean others (to make them want to be horses rather than their riders [102]), Pugliano is presented as an example of the inept poet for our consideration.

Before we compare Sidney's reaction to Pugliano with how we might imagine a particular sort of learned man—one who hopes to influence a prince—reacting to *Utopia's* Raphael, it is important to note that Sidney clearly does not want to introduce his argument by boring his audience. That is, since Sidney wants to demonstrate poetry's worth by engaging and familiarizing his learned audience with poesy's art, he obviously assumes that the learned enjoy the playful ridicule of foreign (Italian) dignitaries. Presumably, the learned man, as with Sidney, also enjoys demonstrating that he has *not* been moved, *not* been "persuaded" (Sidney 102-03), remaining composed, contemplative, and critical of both the "poesy" and the "poet" after his encounter with them. Sidney suggests, though, that we can believe ourselves comported, feel ourselves unmoved, experience ourselves as wholly cognizant, yet still none the less find ourselves influenced and changed: that is, he suggests that the learned man can in fact be moved through bad poesy. Sidney, by example,

demonstrates that he is himself sufficiently moved by his encounter with Pugliano's poesy to make it the introduction to his *Defence*, and he implies that his experience with Pugliano serves, along with the poor regard poesy is held in, as a springboard from which to investigate the nature of good poesy.

The most prominent examples Sidney offers us of good poesy draw our attention as much or more to the poet, and the effect he has on his audience, as he does to the tale. We do not encounter in the *Defence* lengthy replicas of poesy; Sidney's method is instead to wow us with the abilities of a singular individual, like Menenius Agrippa, who, "though he behaves himself like a homely and familiar poet" (125), so "masters" his audience that he creates "such effect in the[m] [. . .] that words [. . .] brought forth so sudden and so good an alteration" (125). Why is this? If we note that the effect Agrippa has on the Romans is as exaggeratingly characterized as Pugliano's purported effect on Sidney (that it almost makes him wish himself a horse [102]) is, we see a pattern: Sidney's account of Agrippa and the Romans makes him comparable in his storytelling "ineptness" to Pugliano. Indeed, in his *Defence* Sidney warns us early on that he, as with Pugliano, is presenting us with examples of "strong affection" (103) (i.e., his enthusiastic desire to persuade), which lead to the creation of "weak arguments" (103) (i.e., over-ripe accounts) out of good material. Unlike Pugliano, Sidney's ineptness is *deliberately* fashioned to move his learned readers to embrace his argument. Sidney's learned contemporaries might, at first,

think most of the argument pure folly and judge it wholly unpersuasive (especially the claim that the playful poet is monarch over the philosopher!), but ultimately find themselves revisiting the memorably presented (with its humor and its daring) defence in their memory and perhaps too, finding some use in practice for the ideas Sidney puts forward. In sum, modifying an expression of Sidney's, we can say that to Sidney "a ['bad'] [. . .] example hath as much force to teach as a ['good'] [. . .] example" (120), at least where the learned are concerned.

It is in book one of *Utopia* that the learned reader who prides himself on his insusceptibility to foolery, perhaps due to being "a piece of a logician" (Sidney 102) himself, likely notes the discrepancy between the nature of a teller and his tale. The Utopians, who "actually practice" (26) "the kind of thing that Plato advocates in his *Republic*" (26), are described in book two as being rooted to their isle: it is their minds, "in their diligence and zeal to learn" (30), which "move" about. Yet Raphael, "eager to see the world" (5), is a sailor who, even after encountering the Utopians and claiming to be so impressed with them he "would never have left" (29), remains a man forever on the go, living, as he tells us, much as he pleases (7-8). The learned man, knowing his Greek, is sure to take pleasure in understanding why Raphael Hythloday is to be understood, in part, as a "speaker of non-sense." As with the *Defence*, this likely leaves the narrator—who in this case is also the character Thomas More—who remains a sceptic, and who remains in part unmoved,

unconvinced at "story's" end, as the person the learned reader is most likely to sympathize and identify with.

At the end of book two More tells us he would like to challenge Raphael on a point, but, noting that Raphael "was tired of talking" (84), and as More remains unsure whether Raphael "could take contradiction in these matters" (84), instead placates him with praise and leads him on to dinner. This odd foreign storyteller Raphael, with his over-lengthy tale, consisting of interesting but often absurd ideas, and with his imperial but clownish persona, clearly is a delight to More. Raphael is harmless; he is not given the authority to win his argument with More that, even delivered with skillful attendance to the particular likes and dislikes of court, it is impossible to give good ideas a fair hearing at court. Instead, much as with Sidney's Pugliano, we learn that a good way of passing on new ideas to courtiers is to frame them within a story dealing with topics of clear interest, such as an Italian courtier and fine horses in the *Defence*, or of strange peoples and their strange worlds in *Utopia*, but to create room for the learned listener to distance himself from the teller and his tale so he doesn't feel manipulated into experiencing our would-be poet as "monarch" (Sidney 123) and himself as subject. Good advice to win the ear, mind, and heart of an advisor, *as well as for him to gain the attention, consideration, and inspiration of a prince*. "Entertain" (7) the prince, and offer him a "supply of examples" (More 7) to discard, and he might just keep some with him, perhaps to help re-invigorate a "fallen" commonwealth once considered worthy of the "highest

estimation” (Sidney 103).

Utopia—if we include both its first and second books—is well framed to both entertain an advisor and inform his address to a prince. It is also well stocked with suggestions that could be refined into promising policy changes that would help improve a commonwealth. *Utopia* is a work of poesy. And if we consider the sort of literature that follows *Utopia* in sixteenth-century England, such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* and Shakespeare’s comedies (with their “green worlds”), it may well be that Sidney’s precept for good poesy, along with More’s fine example of it, moved at least some learned men to attempt to influence a prince. Their “prince,” after all, unlike Raphael’s sketch of a prince from which so much followed, was both acquainted with and interested in much more than simply “the arts of war” (More 8): Queen Elizabeth, that is, was very much interested in re-constituting—and thereafter maintaining—a stable commonwealth out of one divided by (religious) strife.

One last thing needs to be addressed before we part. We have only explained why we believe that, after a close look at both of *Utopia*’s two books, we find *Utopia* corresponds to what Sidney, by both what he directly states and what he indirectly shows, believes qualifies a work as poetic. We have told you we know to inform our judgment with a close look at both books of *Utopia*, and revealed the conclusion we believe follows from having done so. However, we have not exempted ourselves from willfully preferring to stick with our initial impulse and make our assessment primarily based on

Utopia’s second book. Why is this? Because, since we only claimed we learned from Sidney’s argument, and only acknowledged that we were moved by its parts, not by its whole, to make such an assessment would require an exploration not of how well *Utopia* satisfies Sidney’s definition of what poesy is, but rather how well Sidney’s *Defence itself* works as a poetic construction. That is, we would need to explore how well the *Defence* moves us to do what we now know we ought to do. We will gladly explore this with you, but at another time, as we have already talked so much, kept you overlong, and burdened you with many novelties. And besides, we feel sure that “another such [. . .] opportunity will present itself some day” (More 85).

Works Cited

- More, Sir Thomas. *Utopia*. Trans. Robert M. Adams. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1992. Print.
- Sidney, Sir Philip. *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*. Ed. Robert Kimbrough. 2nd ed. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983. Print.

Haunting Raveloe (June 2002)

In George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861), the men at the Rainbow debate over whether or not there is a ghost at the Warren stables. Further, they weigh in on whether a ghost, even if it did exist, would want "ignorant folk" to believe in it. With Silas's unnoticed entrance into the bar, and with his apparition-like countenance, Eliot suggests that ghosts aren't actually all that discriminating as to who they want to believe in them—they just want to be remembered. Silas, of course, is not a ghost, but "ghosts," or presences associated with the past, do haunt many characters in the text. And these ghosts, if ignored, give every reason for people such as those at the Rainbow to be wary of them. Raveloe is also inhabited by an apparition from the future: Eliot herself, as a narrative presence. But Eliot would rather embrace Raveloe than haunt it. In fact, her visit is evidence of the continuing influence of old ways of thinking—of ghosts—on her own life. Knowing intimately the increasing prospects for happiness moderns like her have in an age where seemingly anyone can rise to

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

success, and knowing how different her situation and beliefs that sustain it are from those of the past, she is not be able to shake off the feeling that she has earned punishment for being unfaithful to her heritage. In her unfaithfulness, she is like her character Godfrey Cass. But perhaps—her vicious attack on him notwithstanding—Eliot is more like the diabolically cunning and daring Dunstan, in imagining though her creation *Silas Marner* a stratagem for appeasing the ancestral ghosts. By showing both that she has not forgotten them and that she believes they must be remembered—lest the present prove degenerate!—Eliot placates internal persecutors, but only so as to buy time until she is ready to banish them from her mind altogether! We look first to signs of agitation in the narrator in a text otherwise crafted by a sympathetic but judicious mind, for evidence that Eliot fears she is blameworthy for being an egoistic, willful modern.

When Mr. Macey argues "[a]s if ghos'es 'ud want to be believed in by anybody so ignirant" (Eliot 54), Eliot, with Silas's ghost-like appearance at the Rainbow, is able to suggest otherwise, because his statement could be contradicted by experience. Experience, often in the form of sudden and dramatic changes to everyday life, is most often used by Eliot to show how unpredictable nature is. Eliot's conception of nature likely strikes us as realistic for it being of persistent interaction and change. In Raveloe, or with simple, reclusive people such as Silas, Eliot shows us that because "life [is] [. . .] breathed on variously by multitudinous currents, from the winds of heaven to the thoughts of men[.]

[. . .] [which] are for ever moving and crossing each other, with incalculable results" (23), neither the town nor its inhabitants can long hold life or nature at bay. Realistic-seeming, too, is Eliot's characterization of systems or codes of thought as ideologies particular to a person or people at a particular time and place. She treats those who cling to regular and patterned ways of thinking with sympathy, but in general shows rigid ways of thinking as imposing a form onto reality which Reality either subverts at their user's expense (as with Silas and his ritual of leaving his door unlocked), or which encloses their users in walled-in misery (as is the case with Nancy's "unalterable little code[s]" [156]).

Yet despite this tendency, she herself expresses a tenuous-seeming maxim in the text, namely, that burglars are dull-minded, which she insists is almost always true (39). Furthermore, *Silas Marner* is itself a rhetorical argument for judging the degree to which people are rewarded and punished in life as depending entirely on how selfishly they behave. It advances the same sort of argument we often actually expect to see in a fairy tale, and it reflects a world-view which Dunstan—the character Eliot makes a skeleton of—"deprecate[s]" (74).

Eliot is concerned to show how Godfrey, Dunstan, and Silas think of themselves and how they fare in life. Godfrey, at book's end, has been both punished and rewarded. He is admonished in the text for not having the "moral courage" to own up to his marriage to Molly to Nancy. Yet not informing Nancy did not prevent the marriage, nor did it entirely ruin

his prospects for happiness: he fails to make claim to Eppie, but clearly has found happiness in marriage. With "tenderness," he says to Nancy (175), "I got *you* in spite of all [.] [. . .] and yet I've been grumbling and uneasy because I hadn't something else" (175), adding, "as if I deserved it" (175). Godfrey's brother Dunstan is judged by Eliot for his demoniac cleverness, and is punished more severely; for whereas Godfrey at least had been modest enough to think he deserved punishment, Dunstan extorts his brother and preys upon his neighbors without any self-reproach. To be rewarded with an entirely happy present and with promising future prospects, according to the logic of *Silas Marner*, demands the "humble sort of acquiescence in what was held to be good" (142) that Silas has.

Eliot, who discerns when the landlord, for example, uses "analogical logic" (54), clearly knows and believes that reflection can help one avoid mistaking norms or habits of thought for universally valid truths. Reflecting on "[p]oor Marner" (14), she tells us that "[t]o people accustomed to reason about the forms in which their religious feeling has incorporated itself, it is difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection" (14). According to psychoanalyst Stanley Greenspan, however, even those used to reasoning things out and reflecting before acting, may find that in certain circumstances they are unable to make use of these higher-order thinking processes. He writes:

The emotional guides to our thinking can also lead us astray during extreme states of anxiety, depression, fear, anger, or the like. At such times our emotions become so overwhelming that we are unable to fine-tune our ideas. Thoughts become polarized, rigid, fixed, while inflexible beliefs dominate the mind. (34)

Greenspan, who believes that each of our sensory perceptions is “[labelled] by [. . .] both its physical properties [. . .] and by the emotional qualities we connect with it” (21), and that abstractions are created by “fus[ing] various emotional experiences into a single, integrated concept” (26), would disagree with Eliot’s contention that reflection *severs* form from feeling; to him, reflection, instead, helps us “modulate our emotions” (22). And since even highly abstract concepts like religion are actually *constituted* by emotions (27), no less than the untaught and simple, the reasoning philosopher is not able to exempt herself from emotional influence. Those who seek pure exemption, in fact—and so not just those overrun by base desires—are exactly those to be expected to suffer from extreme lapses of self-control, for their flight no doubt owes to their inexperience in successfully managing what are, of course, *inevitable* emotional upsets.

Perhaps the reason that Eliot, then—at least with the dispersal of rewards and punishments is concerned—suddenly conceives of nature as predictable and orderly, that

it ensures that there *are*, to Dunstan’s huge misfortune, “unpleasant consequences” to people’s actions (73), when otherwise nature is vicarious and unfathomable, is because Eliot herself, with this matter, has not yet managed to entirely free herself from that simple way of thinking too bonded to emotional arousal to enable reflective thought. That is, while writing, when she brings to mind clear examples of egoism, of people’s intention to immodestly satisfy themselves, feeling guilty *for her own* superior intelligence and success, she becomes so agitated she cannot manage that controlled, calibrated state of mind required to notice, and therefore be capable of altering, her inclination to associate ambition with hubris, and see vengeance visited upon all the guilty trespassers.

Eliot, we know, does not always distinguish herself from simpletons; she frequently tells us—often including all humanity in her sweeping generalizations—that we all share some of the mental habits of the simple and honest members of the Raveloe community. But suspiciously, the exceptions—those such as William Dane and Dunstan Cass, who consider themselves exceptional, and who expect status and riches—are also those whose gains she insists on characterizing as ill-gotten. William, whom his peers see as being “so dazzled by his own light as to hold himself wiser than his teachers” (10), displaces Silas as a revered brother with a plot that involves stealing from the deacon. Dunstan, who “swaggers” (34), who is always on the lookout “to take [. . .] someone in” (34), refers to Silas as an “old staring

simpleton" (39). William and Dunstan are youngsters who not only disrespect their elders—the teachers, with William, the elderly, with Dunstan—but are indifferent to their fates once they have left them behind in pursuit of further “petty egoistic” (156) acquisitions. Dunstan possesses a singular ability to arouse Eliot. Eliot, who seems to find every way to find virtue in the simplest of minds, finds none at all when she estimates Dunstan’s as dull. But is this *really* how she thinks of him? We note how she attaches this label just after his dismissing Silas as but an old simpleton. Further, while the sequence that has him ride his horse to death and burglar Silas shows him as an impulse-driven, unthinking fool, previously Dunstan not only showed considerable cunning in his mastery over his brother but also showed himself a competent master of his emotional state. Considering that Eliot characterizes Dunstan’s manipulation of Godrey so that it seems much more diabolically clever than miscreant but otherwise dull, spite and vengeance, not reasoned fair commentary, clearly is moving her pen here.

Previously Eliot showed Dunstan as a risk-taker, but a thoughtful and intelligent one, emphasizing his own self-control and Godrey’s lack thereof. While Godrey succumbs to a “movement of compunction [. . .] which was a blight on his life,” it is Dunstan who sees “in his brother’s degrading marriage the means of gratifying at once his jealous hate and his cupidity” (31), and seizes upon his opportunity. Godrey prefers to intimidate rather than reason with his brother. Godrey, “mastered by [. . .] fear,” would flog [Dunstan] [. . .]

within an inch of his life” (29). Dunstan, in contrast, maintains, even while under physical threat from threat, “an air of unconcern” (29). His insouciance owes to having sufficient insight into his brother’s ways that he can simply “wait” (29) for Godrey to stop resisting, and then lead him to accept his terms. If Eliot was to make a fair assessment of Dunstan’s intelligence and impulse control at this point in the narrative, she really could do no better than to suggest, as Godrey does, that he could have “more sharpness” (27). But even in this she would be in error, because one of Dunstan’s goals—unfortunate as it surely is—is to agitate his brother as much as possible. He braves a trial, risks error (or “oversho[oting] his mark” [27]), but thereby better knows just how well he has caught his brother out. Ultimately, we note, Godrey acquiesces; Dunstan accomplishes his goal, and need not fear Godrey. But Dunstan is *not*, however, safe from *Eliot*, and it is she, incapable of the restraint that even Godrey manages, who ultimately “knock[s] [. . .] [Dunstan] down” (28).

What Dunstan in particular represents to Eliot is someone who “forsake[s] a decent craft that he may pursue the gentilities of a profession to which nature never called him” (74). Dunstan, the second son, lives a gentry-life of drink, horseriding, and leisure, and has his elder brother contemplate the consequences of becoming a soldier (28). In his presumption, Dunstan is similar to William Dane, who, though favored, is not looked upon with quite the reverence as those thought selected by God (such as Silas) for a special

purpose are. As with Dunstan, William, when he devises means to benefit at Silas's expense, betrays the bond that ought to exist between brothers, and both of these "betrayers" are actually similar in nature to Eliot and her contemporaries. Mid-Victorians, as with Dunstan, and as with later born sons, rather than having clear roles and identities thrust upon them, have instead the nebulous freedom to shape their fates themselves. Elder sons have an obvious link to the past in that they would—as with Godrey—"come into the land someday" (24). They are more easily imagined—again, as with Godrey (and as Eliot herself imagines him)—"as having an essentially domestic nature" (31), and are thus not subject (as Eliot imagines Dunstan) to wanderlust. Eliot, like Dunstan and William, possesses the intelligence to, if she should desire, manipulate those about her for her own benefit. Moreover, they all have sufficient will and self-confidence to accept the risks involved in pursuing ambitious goals. In a complex, modern, ever-changing society, this degree of intelligence and will would be necessary, not just to succeed but simply to meaningfully participate, and would have been imagined by Eliot and her contemporaries, the norm for their age. But perhaps the habitual association of this sort of intelligence as egoistic and self-serving—as "bad"—afflicts people like Eliot sufficiently that it still leads to attempts at penance, variant enough to include the likes of Eliot's attempt to punish her likeness in her writing, and necessitates efforts to exonerate themselves from charges they belong to a dangerously degenerate age far removed in

purity from the "honest[y] [belonging to] [. . .] their ancestors" (20).

We know that Eliot is concerned to show how intrusive past events can be upon our present existence. Eliot tells us that Nancy "filled the vacant moments by living inwardly, over and over again, through all her remembered experience" (154), an experience Eliot characterizes as a "morbid habit of mind" (154). And with Godrey, Eliot shows us someone who cannot, simply by changing his patterns of thinking, free himself from torment. For even if Godrey was, with the gracious assistance of time, to forget his past, *the past has not chosen to forget or forgive him!* Eliot conjures up Molly as a revenant, as an embodied ghost who returns from the dead to punish Godrey. The passage of time, forgetfulness, actually works to Molly's advantage, for she wants nothing more than to catch Godrey just when he feels safe enough from harm to venture out to pursue a relationship with Nancy. Eliot wishes Godrey had the moral courage to tell Nancy about his marriage to Molly earlier than he in fact does; but considering it is difficult to believe Eliot imagines this would not have ruined his chances with her, using *his* confession of wrongfulness toward Molly to express the wrongfulness of *her own* neglect of her past would seem untenable, a false-confession—a lie. Eliot *is*, however, trying to demonstrate to internal persecutors, to ghosts nesting in her mind, that with *Silas Marner* she is remembering her forefathers—her "neighbors" from the past—and that she not only values them but, given the chance, would readily stand up for them.

Eliot defends the Raveloe inhabitants both through subtle plot contrivances and through impassioned narrative rants. The members of the Raveloe community are described as simple and honest, but at times, also as vengeful and barbaric. At the beginning of Eliot's account, it is only fear, born of superstition, which prevents Silas "from the persecution that his singularities might have drawn upon him" (9). And near book's end, Silas's isolation helps protect Eppie from "the lowering influences of [. . .] village talk and habits" (146). The result is that, since we never do witness their persecution of Silas, nor do we see Eppie grow into anything other than a pure child, we are most likely to associate the typical Raveloean with the benevolent Dolly. Eliot also has the chance to actively defend Nancy (apparently from some of the readers she has "invited along") when she seeks to reprove "grammatically fair ones," who cannot fathom how her "feelings can at all resemble theirs" (93). And Eliot sometimes even sounds like a proud member of the Raveloe community, especially when she mimics, with her diatribe against those who seek more than they were by nature ordained to possess, the Raveloean hatred for those who "wish to be better than the 'common run'" (80).

With *Silas Marner*, Eliot proves to herself she is more the favored who embraces the past than a truant concerned to disparage it. As with Eppie's soothing remarks to her father when he fears he may lose her upon marriage, that he is not so much losing a daughter as gaining a son, Eliot tells herself that as a successful modern writer she is not detaching herself

from the norms of her forefather but rather attaching, with a supposed respect for old folkways in her writing, a new age to her own. So doing, she hopes to replace her habitual conception of those "who ha[ve] more cunning than honest folks [. . .] [not using] that cunning in a neighbourly way" (77), with her preferred sense that "mind[s] [. . .] of extraordinary acuteness must necessarily contemplate the doings of their fallible fellow-men" (102). She hopes, as proved true with Eppie, having placated her "relations," she might better enjoy her own refinement and difference.

It is even possible that Eliot may not, at heart, truly respect her forefathers. Indeed, there are signs in the text that she thinks the poverty of "ordinary farmers" (68)—the prototypical inhabitant of our pastoral past—a condition they both could and *should* have freed themselves from. We feel this when she draws our attention to how similar in nature the Raveloe farmers are to Squire Cass, remarking that because they have "slouched their way through life with a consciousness of being in the vicinity of their 'betters,' [they] want that self-possession and authoritativeness of voice and carriage which belong[s] to a man who thought of superiors as remote existences" (68). Perhaps for Eliot, Raveloe is akin to the brown pot Silas keeps by his hearth: it is be kept and tended to only while its mistreatment might "bruise [her] [. . .] roots" (142)—that is, while its removal or replacement would disturb her. But just as Silas might one day come to experience his precious relic—the last remaining piece at book's end of his dwelling's old furnishings—as but a plain

old pot he's too long kept near his side, Eliot might come to see Raveloe—or, rather, the composite of place, time, and people Raveloe represents—as irrelevant, and forget, now, exactly why she once placed so much interest in it. Considering Eliot's previous loving sentiment, thoughts, and words, this would be a considerable betrayal of her forefathers, but as she herself tells us, "language is a stream that is almost sure to smack of a mingled soil" (78).

Works Cited

- Eliot, George. *Silas Marner*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.
- Greenspan, Stanley. *Growth of the Mind: And the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997. Print.

Introductions and Initiations (August 2002)

Phyllis Webb's "To Friends Who Have Also Considered Suicide" is a deceptive poem. Rather than a dedication to those who have already considered suicide, it is instead a rite of passage, an initiation ritual conducted by an experienced master, who would have us share her enlightened state. The process is painful, and the rewards, mixed. We ascend at the expense of others. Our western heritage, our leaders, our institutions, are made to seem banal, tired. But she herself conveys so much urgency, so passionate a desire to show us the way, and displays an imagination so formidable it not only knocks down old worlds but conjures up colorful new vistas, that, in the end, we finish the poem excited, even grateful, despite her trickery.

After reading the title, we begin the poem wondering if she means for *us* to be reading it. Are *we* her friends? Does she mean to speak only to those she is intimate with and are in the know? While our status is uncertain, we know that we are attending to someone who pretends, at least, to be a

master: she begins with a confident, didactic, “It [is]” (1). And by the way she chooses to introduce the poem, we soon decide that the poem is actually written for those who might be anxious about exploring a poem about suicide, the uninitiated—*us*. The first two lines are kept short, as if giving us time to prepare ourselves. Each line is well balanced both visually and in syllabic weight, before and after “a” in the first line and “is” in the second line. When we consider what follows, these two lines seem a sturdy space to ready ourselves before crossing an obvious threshold.

The colon at the end of the second line, and a beckoning mystery, propels us onward. The first two lines are enigmatic. What is a “good idea” (1)—to consider committing suicide, or simply to consider the concept of suicide? What does exercise or discipline have to do with suicide? Isn’t suicide impulsive? Our master, by harnessing our curiosity, pulls us through a threshold—a succession of lines that begin with the words “to remember,” which momentarily confine us. We, too, in sympathetic response to this four-line structure, imagine ourselves as confined, our body as inflexible, as paralyzed, as is this sequence of the poem.

The movement in these lines is of something or someone else—perhaps death, perhaps suicide, perhaps the poet—who comes with each successive line closer and closer to us. From “street” (3) to “car” (4) to “clothes” (5) to “eat” (6), something moves from being distant and external to ourselves to the cusp of being within us. And, as if in through the mouth, into the blood, and into our brain, this presence

acts like a virus, which, now controlling our nervous system, has us use our musculature to kill ourselves. We are now initiated. The presence was that of our master, preparing us with bodily mutilations for our new spiritual ascension; and we are now most certainly amongst those who have considered suicide.

But as with all painful initiations, there is the promise of a reward. As if we now possess new powers, new capacities, she has us survey friends, family, philosophers, politicians, financiers—those we have formerly peopled our world with—and with advantage: we cause “emotions” (14), we cause “embarrass[ment]” (17), and we avoid the meaninglessness of lives which consist of setting up pointless activities, whether the “swim[ming] of lakes” (24) or the “climb[ing] [of] flagpoles” (24). In contrast, our “daily walk” (26), she argues, is no routine, no exercise, no contrivance that wastes life. It is instead an opportunity to live in such a way that our life fills with so much spirit it becomes almost—like “sand in the teeth” (32)—an irritant to death.

But how rewarding is mockery? A new brethren of those whose daily occupation is to contemplate the sins of others is too much like that of a monastic brotherhood to be broadly appealing. Fortunately, our master would have us spend little time contemplating our “western fact” (35), our past, our collective waste of a heritage. We should now, like postmoderns, look eastwards.

Despite her manipulative—perhaps rude—introduction to us, we likely appreciate our time with someone with such a

passionate desire to take us places, to show and tell us things, and who declares over and over again with certainty and a life-affirming tone—"it is." She doesn't tell us what we can expect eastwards; but if there there are "bright crustaceans of the oversky"—such an evocative image—or if we might somehow fashion them there, we have cause to think ourselves newly enlightened and inspired by our poet, our enigmatic master, who walks with death.

Work Cited

Webb, Phyllis. "To Friends Who Have Also Considered Suicide." *15 Canadian Poets X3*. Ed. Gary Geddes. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2001. 142-43. Print.

Poet as Physician (August 2002)

Words are loaded with possibilities for those who well attend to them. We may choose to limit our response to them to creating our best simulation of the meaning we intuit its speaker (or writer) wants for them to depart. Or we can play off the visual sounds and oral properties of the word—which so often want to take us places their speaker never intended—and use them to travel elsewhere. Words, though, do not always invite active play. If a word impacts upon us as a blow, if it almost literally has punch, our reaction can be limited to recoil and recuperation. Daphne Marlatt's "Healing," with its appropriate one word title, explores how we can use language to respond to the power a single word can have on us to curtail play.

How might you deal with the painful experience of having a lover vulnerable in an operating room, being operated upon by a knife-wielding surgeon? As the form our encapsulation of this experience might take is of an implosion, of a contraction of all the energy, of all the pain

and worry funneling into a single moment, a single cut, we might react as the poet/lover of “Healing” does and surround this experience with an evocation of nature to cushion and challenge its impact.

“Healing” begins with soft and softening images of nature. “Petals” (1), “blue irise[s]” (2), “moss” (2), and “dandelions” (2) accumulate into a pastoral image, and the poet is alone resting on a field, unhurried by time. Words, here, seem to relate to each other tenderly; they “kiss [the] middle distance” (1) between themselves. Then we encounter a word, “incision” (4), which interferes with the flow. “Incision” is not so much a word with dramatic impact as it is by itself a drama. More than a word, more than a wound, it is the entire story of emotions that began when two lovers realized the power of the lust and love between them would be challenged—*replaced*—by the anticipated impact and repercussions of a strange surgeon’s lunge. Nestled, though, amongst a softening scene, the poet uses words to help her anticipate a time when the impact of surgery, of the surgeon, no longer filled the “middle distance” between them.

Our first sense of the play of language transforming and easing trauma is the word sequence, “hours without touch” (3). There is an expression of loss, of absence, here—hours *denied* touch. But the same vowels we both see and hear in each of these words evoke meaning, too, that of accumulation, addition, growth. “[I]ncision to knit” (4) captures what the poet is trying to do: slowly she replaces the invading image of a stranger inflicting a wound on her lover

with an image that resonates of intimacy, of the lovers together, of wounds closed and healed. An example of this transformation is “i want to open you like a / butterfly” (11-12), where she resuscitates the image of the surgery, but not only replaces the surgeon with herself, she substitutes a wound’s pain with the butterfly’s beauty. The arena for the operation is also shifting from the hospital (“open you” still brings to mind an operating room) to nature.

The entire second stanza can be imagined as a re-creation of the moment of the surgery and its after-effect(s), but *within* nature. The eagles, with their talons, with their predatory positioning (surveying from above) over prey, are nature’s substitutes for the knife-wielding surgeon. And their “scream” (13) challenges the impact of the implosion, of the wound, with an explosion that will help heal it. Words help mimic the dispersion of the eagles’ sound across both distance and time. “[G]lee” (14), “glass” (15), “glisten” (15), “glare” (15), glide us through the text, and as if each word modulates the effect of the scream on the poet as much as on ourselves, she reclaims with “(g)listen” (16) the right to act upon a word as much as a word had impacted upon her.

Presented first with “glisten,” she brackets off the “g,” leaving herself with “listen”—surely, to a poet, the most powerful of words. To listen with care is the command a poet makes of her reader. And as we take her direction and attend to this word, we see, hear, and feel both its clear resemblance and its challenge to “incision.” She proves that if we listen to her we will indeed come to know how powerful a physician a

poet is. The surgeon has made his mark. “[I]ncision” has had its impact. We know, however, she will “re-knit” her bond to her lover, and that they will begin to know “lust [. . .] all over again” (22).

Work Cited

Marlatt, Daphne. “Healing.” *15 Canadian Poets X3*. Ed. Gary Geddes. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2001. 372. Print.

Leaving Home (November 2002)

The speaker of Elizabeth Daryush’s “Children of wealth in your warm nursery” enters our “home[s]” (13) to warn us. S/he tells us we are prisoners, that our current home is a prison, and that our guardians cannot be trusted. S/he wants us to leave, to “go out” (9), but getting us to leave is a difficult task: s/he must provoke us to consider uncomfortable truths and to leave comfortable settings. The speaker must first gain our attention, then earn our trust, before we could consider no longer being “[c]hildren of wealth” (1).

The speaker explicitly addresses “[c]hildren of wealth in [. . .] warm nurser[ies]” (1), but implicitly addresses all those who live privileged lives amongst privileged surroundings (ostensibly including most Western readers of poetry). “Children of wealth” brings to mind “children of God”: s/he implies that we *belong* to a god, a false one, and that, whatever our age, we are de facto children. The speaker defines us with two objectives in mind: first, as s/he issues a warning, s/he

wants us to imagine ourselves as children so that we are—like the children deliberately “[s]et in the cushioned window-seat” (2)—more likely to listen, “watch” (2), and attend; second, “[c]hildren of wealth” suggests that we are captives, but does not suggest that affluence has irrevocably tainted, ruined, or spoiled us (as may have been the case if s/he had addressed us as “wealthy children”). Wealth claims but does not define “its” children: the speaker readies us for exodus.

The speaker wants us to “go out” and experience the outside world. Neonates, however, require preparation, and the speaker prepares us to accept two terrible truths: the world out there is “cruel” (6), and so too the negligence we have suffered at the hands of our custodians. We are, however, braced to hear these truths. The speaker shapes her/his warning so that it contracts (and intensifies) as s/he proceeds. We know that s/he has given us time in the initial octave to prepare ourselves for the expostulation in the quatrain and the prophecy in the concluding couplet. Whoever s/he is, we sense her/him tending to us.

In the octave we are told that we have little “knowledge” (8) of what “winter means” (6)—that is, about the outside world. The speaker forewarns that this world is as cruel as we might imagine it to be. But the second stanza’s expostulation, which encourages us to “[w]aste [our] [. . .] too round limbs” (10) and “tan [our] [. . .] skin too white” (10), implies that life outside of the “double-pane” (4) is harsh, but not necessarily devastating. Devastation—burning, not tanning—the speaker tells us, awaits those of us who linger “too” (10) long

hereafter in comfortable settings.

The speaker’s provocation in the concluding couplet to imagine “your [own] home” (13) burning, is daring and risky, but more so is her/his insinuation that our guardians may be responsible for the fire. “Your” parents, “your” ancestors, the speaker implies, may be negligent, or worse—*malevolent*—in creating a prison (a “citadel” [7]) and a fire-trap out of “your home[s]” and heritage. S/he risks alienating us; “parents” have a strong hold over their “children.” But perhaps our speaker’s risk-taking helps convince us of her sincerity and trustworthiness.

Indeed, we might conclude that our earnest speaker, so apparently aware of the worlds on either side of the “double pane[s],” was once a “[c]hild [. . .] of wealth” her/himself. S/he escaped dominion, we might conclude, and returns only to warn us. But if s/he isn’t, we might one day grieve if “[t]oday” (12) for fear of fire, we leave our cozy cushions for the cold “night” (12) of “winter” (6).

Work Cited

Daryush, Elizabeth. “Children of wealth in your warm nursery.” *Anthology of Twentieth-Century and Irish Poetry*. Ed. Keith Tuma. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 117. Print.

From Humble(d) Beginnings (November 2003)

As a boy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was badly bullied. His brother Frank bullied him because he thought Samuel was their mother's favorite son. Samuel became "fretful" and "timorous" (Weissman 110). Shunned by other boys for being a sissy, Samuel read books about adventures and playfully acted out the tales. But his father, believing Samuel to be overwhelmed by the books' scary parts, burnt the books. This Coleridge was understandably pleased after writing "This Lime-Tree Bower," because "Lime-Tree" was an imaginative attempt to shape his boyhood miseries into a boon. However, Coleridge had once both turned the tables on his brother and successfully braved an evening alone outside his home. And *this* Coleridge, the person he might have been had he not been bullied, the one who thought of himself as wild and free, is the person he tried to recover in subsequent poetry. Through first rejecting (in the re-write of "Lime-Tree" and in "Frost at Midnight") the accommodating tone and the self-deceptive stance of "Lime-Tree," Coleridge

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

regains the will in "France: an Ode" to once again brave placing himself before a threatening night sky. And out there, outside, Coleridge claims liberty from all "prisons," self-imposed or otherwise.

In "Lime Tree," Coleridge characterizes himself as "lame," "faint," and "lonely." He pretends that this status—the consequence here of Sarah spilling hot milk on his foot—is unusual. The norm, he pretends, was for him to roam about with friends. But Coleridge grew up denied the outdoor play others enjoyed. His brother Frank intimidated him until he became the sort of person—a sissy—other boys would have nothing to do with (Weissman 110). He compensated by reading adventure stories, but his father, "disliking the effect [. . .] which these books had produced" (Coleridge, "Dearest Poole" 346-50), burnt the books, just as Sarah burns Coleridge's foot in "Lime-Tree." Coleridge had his whole childhood to persuade himself that deprivation is a good thing, so his revelation in "Lime-tree" is better understood as a capitulation to the status imposed upon him by boyhood bullies than as enlightenment. But Coleridge penned "Lime-Tree" prepared to repudiate the lame representation of himself in the poem as someone whose natural company is the hornless, stingless, humble-bee.

Perhaps buoyed by his friendship with the "great man" Wordsworth, and certainly building on the one night as a boy he had threatened his brother with a knife, Coleridge alters "Lime-Tree" in the re-write so he seems more commanding than accommodating. The accommodating Coleridge in the

first version is the one who discovers virtues in “narrow” places, and who states that “sometimes / [t]is well to be bereaved of promised good, / [t]hat we may lift the soul and contemplate [. . .] the joys we cannot share.” The commanding Coleridge is the one who in the re-write alters the dell his friends explore so it becomes awe-inspiring and threatening.

In the original version there is a “rifted dell, where many an ash / [t]wists its wild limbs beside the ferny rock.” In the re-write there is a “roaring dell, o’erwooded, narrow [. . .] [and] deep.” In the original version he imagines his friends only “look[ing]” into the dell; the re-write has them “winding down” into it. The result of this alteration is that when Coleridge addresses the sun, clouds, grove, and ocean, he is commanding these elements to do battle with the dell. Despite all of the exclamation marks ending statements such as “[r]ichlier burn, ye clouds!” and “kindle, though blue ocean!,” in the first version, because he has not evoked the image of a threatening dell, Coleridge’s address seems more a wistful plea for nature to tend to his long-suffering friend Charles Lamb than a command to rescue him from threatening surroundings. The reference to his friend’s deprived status as a city-dweller is still there in the re-write, but it is overwhelmed, outmatched, by the more evocative dell.

Lamb objected to being described in “Lime-Tree” as a “gentle” city-dweller that needed “rescuing,” and asked that Coleridge change how he characterized him in subsequent

versions of the poem (Wu 458). Coleridge never complied with his friend’s request; instead, in the re-write he ends up leaving out his own self-description as “lame,” “lonely,” and “faint.” The removal of these descriptors is appropriate, for in the re-write Coleridge acts in such a way that he no longer warrants being described as the human equivalent of the humble bee.

Coleridge, while he commands nature, does not in the re-write usurp his bower-prison. What he does do is italicize the word “usurp” in the text, which only adds to the many exclamation marks in the poem, a disturbance to its meditative mood. Coleridge does not usurp “prisons” in “Frost at Midnight,” either, but he makes clear in this poem the real reason he chose not to do so in “Lime-Tree.”

As was the case in “Lime-Tree,” Coleridge is denied access to “playmate[s]” in “Frost at Midnight.” Unlike “Lime-Tree,” he boldly addresses rather than camouflages his perpetual boyhood experience of being “dr[iven] [. . .] from play” (“Dearest Poole” 346-50). What keeps him “imprisoned” in “Frost at Midnight” is not an accident but rather the “stern preceptor’s [intimidating] face.” And rather than discovering that there is “[n]o scene so narrow but may well employ / [e]ach faculty of sense, and keep the heart / [a]wake to love and beauty,” in “Frost at Midnight” “narrow” scenes lead inevitably to restricted happiness. “Cloister[ed]” living is not redeemed in this poem by discovering virtue in denied pleasures. Instead, Coleridge is regretful that he “saw *nought* lovely [as a child] *but* the sky and stars (emphasis

added)."

In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge hopes his son will not be confined to narrow scenes as he once was. He hopes instead his son will "wander [epic landscapes] like the breeze." However, because he refers to the night sky as the only redemptive element he knew as a boy, Coleridge may already be preparing to wander about awesome environments himself. Coleridge's sole experience as a child of usurping bullies and enduring outside dangers involved spending an evening alone before the night sky. Though it may have been only one occasion, Coleridge *had* on this occasion known what it was to fight back "without running back to his mother, [. . .] proving he was no sissy or tattletale" (Weissman 118). He ran outside his home and endured a "dreadful stormy night" (Coleridge, "Dear Poole" 352-56), proving he could handle the fearsome experiences his father thought him incapable of. And in "France: An Ode," Coleridge leaves his bower-prison behind to wind his "moonlight way" "[t]hrough glooms which never woodman trod."

Coleridge begins "France: An Ode" with an apology: he must apologize to nature for controlling it in the re-write of "Lime-Tree." The clouds he had commanded to "richlier burn" become the clouds that "no mortal may control." The woods that he had the "ancient ivy" "*usurp*," now are "imperious" and master the wind. Coleridge has no interest here in the "sweet sounds" and "pleasing shapes" of nature that inspired capitulation in "Lime-Tree." He is instead intent

on rediscovering amidst the "rude shape[s] [. . .] and wild unconquerable sound[s]" of nature, the obstinacy, the will, to refuse to "[y]ield homage" to those who would curtail his freedom.

He does not exempt himself. Coleridge repudiates in "France: an Ode" those who are "[s]laves by their own compulsion[,] [. . .] [who] wear the name / [o]f freedom graven on a heavier chain." He likely is thinking of himself here—or at least the version of himself who pretended in "Lime-Tree" that deprivation can lead to "wis[dom]," "pur[ity]," and happiness. This Coleridge, who used his imagination to transform a prison into a holy site, needed no stern eye to keep him in place. Nor should he have feared punishment: he was willing to pretend that physical incapacitation can be a good thing.

The Coleridge in "France: An Ode" should expect punishment—but *this* Coleridge is not intimidated. Standing before nature he declares he will not be anyone's slave. But because, despite the certainty of punishment, he had still as a boy managed to defy brother, father, and mother—those who had, as with Sarah in "Lime-Tree," made him into a pitiful home-body—Coleridge had already learned that "obstinacy vanquish[es] [. . .] fears" ("Dear Poole" 352-56).

By rediscovering this insight, a more profound discovery than anything found in the bower-prison, outside, before a night sky, Coleridge also recovers what he hopes is his true self: "Oh Liberty, [he proclaims,] my [true] spirit felt thee *there!*" (emphasis added).

Works Cited

- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Dear Poole." 16 October 1781.
Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. E. L. Grigg.
Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon, 1956. Print.
- . "France: An Ode." *Romanticism: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Ed.
Duncan Wu 465-468. Malden: Blackwell, 1998. Print.
- . "Frost at Midnight." Duncan Wu 462-465.
- . "My Dearest Poole." 9 October 1797. E. L. Griff.
- . "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." Duncan Wu 458-59,
551-52.
- Weissman, Stephen. *His Brother's Keeper: A Psychobiography of
Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Madison: International
Universities, 1989. Print. Wu, Duncan, ed. *Romanticism:
An Anthology*.

Alexander the Large (March 2003)

There were four of us to six of them[,] [. . .] So there
we were dratsing away in the dark, [. . .] the stars
stabbing away as it might be knives anxious to join in
the dratsing. [. . .] Of the four of us Dim, as usual,
came out the worst in point of looks, that is to say his
litso was all bloodied and his platties a dirty mess, but
the others of us were still cool and whole. It was
stinking fatty Billyboy I wanted now, and there I was
dancing about with my britva like I might be a barber
on board a ship of a very rough sea, trying to get in at
him with a few fair slashes on his unclean oily litso.
Billyboy had a nozh, a long flick-type, but he was a
malenky bit too slow and heavy in his movements to
vred anyone really bad. And, my brothers, it was real
satisfaction to me to waltz—left two three, right two
three—and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that
like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the
same time, one on either side of his fat filthy oily

snout in the winter starlight. (Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* 14-15)

When Alex begins his nighttime adventure, he tells us that “[y]ou were not put on this earth just to get in touch with God” (5). In this passage, Alex shows just the sort of activity he believes constitutes living life to its fullest. He delights in recounting how he used his physical fitness and artistic finesse to ensure his own gang—outnumbered, as he twice tells us, six to four—masters Billyboy’s. He thinks his mastery of the dangerous but eventful world of the night qualifies him as a man-god, as an “Alexander the Large” (36), and, given how often others single him out, the evident pleasure he has in recounting his exploits, and our own possible admiration for those who would rather live than not-live, he may well be right.

This dramatic fight is framed by the night sky, by stars Alex imagines as “anxious to join in.” And, indeed, Alex’s clash with a rival gang *is* such a tantalizing drama it is easy to imagine the backdrop wanting in. The wonderment of seeing a combatant using his opponent as a canvas for artistically delivered razor strokes is such that we likely do not let Alex’s abundant use of similes distract or transport us from the action: the activity of this warrior of the night—this knight—is much more interesting to us than is a barber on rough seas. This is Alex at his best; this is Alex most convincingly proving (“my brothers”) that “what [he] [. . .] do [he] [. . .] do because [he] [. . .] like to do” (31). And he is certainly more

compelling here than the restrained ordinary people, the “not-selves” (31), we imagine populating the day-world of *A Clockwork Orange*. So unlike them, Alex lives a risky, daring, and exhilarating life. So, too, do Dim and Billyboy; but unlike these brutes, Alex is so competent a fighter, has such an appreciation of and capacity for artistic expression and for play, that he orchestrates his tactical movements into a waltz, and ensures he leaves battles both “cool and whole.”

What Alex demonstrates in this fight is the synthesis of force and grace once thought to constitute the ideal knight. But Alex serves no one, and his jubilant egoism makes him seem more an example of Friedrich Nietzsche’s man-god, a superman. Alex only assumes the pose of a (self-abnegating) Christian knight to avoid experiencing crippling pain. And, amidst this later scene, where Dr. Brodsky demonstrates the success of his experiment, we remember Alex’s previous mastery. When Alex licks the actor’s boots, when he “throw[s] [his] [. . .] heart [at the actress’s feet] for [her] [. . .] to [. . .] trample [. . .] over” (95), we know that without the treatment Alex would have forced the actor into less palatable positions.

But this later scene, which resembles the gang fight in that it is also “staged” as a dramatic event, is one where Dr. Brodsky “controls the curtains,” inflicts the pain, and thus directs the show. However, it is still one where Alex plays the starring role, and we might wonder, considering that his own sense of himself as special is supported by his wide-spread public notoriety (the police tell him that “everyone knows [. .

.] [him]" [50], and later his face is all over the papers) and by being singled out for important roles (i.e., he is the first person "reformed" and the instrument for toppling the government and its opposition) throughout the novel, if he fascinates, if he is special to Burgess, too.

Considering that Burgess's own wife was once raped, it would be crass to argue that he might want to be Alex. But given the novel's setting of a homogenized, socialist dystopia, Alex's youthful exuberance and playfulness, his manly competence and physical prowess shines that much brighter than it otherwise might. The result of the contrast between Alex and the suppressing, tyrannical world about him, is that we, Burgess, the press, as much as the stars, might all find ourselves as irresistibly drawn as we are repelled by the nighttime dramas of Alexander the Large.

Work Cited

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.

Greedy for Your Hurt (March 2003)

One of the hardest things we can ever admit to ourselves is that the source of our fears of death originates in our parents' behavior towards us as children. We depend on them so much for love and security that we often resist, even in adulthood, acknowledging the effect that either their own hostility towards us, or their failure to defend us against the hostile wishes of others, had upon us. Though Del Jordan in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, the narrator of Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles*, and Andrea Ashworth in her *Once in a House on Fire*, all associate death with parental violence or betrayal, they each vary in their ability to acknowledge parental sadism and thus the degree to which they conceal it in their narratives.

As there is nothing we more want to deny than our parents' hostile impulses towards us (Rheingold 19), it is astonishing and exceedingly rare for Del not only to recognize but to *demand* we attend to them. After recounting her mother saying that you have to "face things sometime"

(52), Del faces up to the fact that many parents want “you” to suffer. When she relates her insight to us she does so fully aware that this is an insight many of us suspect is true but wish to deny. “Yes,” she tells us, after beginning by dispensing her insight carefully, referring to the hostility in “people” rather than isolating it in our parents, this “greed for your hurt” is “in parents too; in parents particularly” (52). But what Del does not so overtly relate to us is the effect this sadism had upon her. Given that she sandwiches this insight between her recollection of how she tried to “desecrate” (49) a dead cow and her desperate but successful struggle to resist seeing her Uncle Craig’s corpse, we intuit that it made her think not only of death, but of the horrifying potential to find oneself powerless in presence of death.

It is when she reflects on her father’s attitude when he decided to shoot their dog Major that the pairing of parents with powerlessness, betrayal, and death insinuates within her own family circle sufficiently for it to become personally relevant enough to startle her. Just as she was able to acknowledge that parents want their children to suffer, she emphasizes that they “*want*” (126; emphasis in original) others to die. But with this powerful insight, rather than keeping us tightly focused on the source of her inspiration, she lets the fact that it was her father’s “reasonable, blasphemous face” (126) that enabled her insight to lose its distinct importance. While her mother’s hostility was loosely concealed within the general category of parents, her father’s desire for death comes close to merging completely with that shared by

“adults, managers and executioners” (126).

Del’s relative evasiveness here is likely the product of a fear that, put in a position where others want her to suffer a stern punishment, her father might not be relied upon to defend her. Her Aunt Agnes had told her previously that she was a “mad dog” (61) who ought to be punished. Del felt that biting Mary Agnes—the cause of her Aunt’s anger—would draw upon her all the hatred of everyone at the funeral, and though she hoped that biting her would put her “where no punishment would ever” (61) reach her, she depended upon her parents to defend her against the sum of hostility directed at her. Her mother immediately did defend her reluctance to participate in a “barbaric” (62) ritual, but given that Del had previously discussed her mother’s betrayal—her mother’s own desire “for her hurt”—she needed to know that her father could be depended upon for support and defence. She therefore understandably understands her father’s intention to shoot Major for his mad-dog behavior as evidence that he may not be the pillar of support she would prefer and well needs him to be. Her dreams of her “kind, [. . .] calm, [. . .] reasonable” father “cutting off [her] [. . .] head” (125), her fears that he may not be counted on, inspire her to temporarily look elsewhere—to God—for support.

However, Del’s father’s reaction to Major’s behavior is unusual enough for Del to think it “blasphemous” (126). And Del’s mother, while she is simultaneously continuing her own private war against Death we see such strong signs of elsewhere in the text (e.g., in her explanation of what Death is

[42]), is strong in her daughter's moment of need. If Del hadn't had parents upon whom she could, for the most part, rely upon for protection—or who were the sort of people she most needed protection *from*—she would likely have written a novel that betrays the same need to deny one's vulnerability to death we encounter in *Les Enfants Terribles*. Del demonstrates strength, not weakness, when she tells us of her desire to desecrate a dead cow in an attempt to master death. She is able to acknowledge how greatly aware and affected by death she was as a child. Weakness, instead, lies in trying to persuade yourself—as the narrator of *Les Enfants Terribles* does—that children are simply “unable to imagine death” (18). What this narrator shows us is that, while adulthood might normally bring a broader understanding of death, with children who have experienced extreme parental abuse, “adulthood” mainly means a “maturing” of such early-learned survival skills like self-deception.

While the narrator claims he tells us the story of two children, it is more likely, given the way in which he describes Elisabeth and the way she relates to Paul, that he tells the story of an extremely immature mother's (probably his own) possessive relationship over her son. Very immature mothers, mothers who were so unloved and unattended to in life they require their children to supply their unmet needs, interpret their children's individuation as their rejecting them (DeMause 151). Their mothers' anger over this perceived spurning often leads children to fear that, unless they somehow stop growing, they will suffer catastrophe, even

death, as punishment (Rheingold 137). They fear, in short, that they would suffer what Paul suffers at the hands of Elisabeth, when she understands not only that “her nursling was a child no longer” (62), but that he wants to grow up.

While the narrator repeatedly describes Elisabeth as mother-like (we are told, for instance, that she speaks “in the manner of a maternal” [52]; we are even told that her own mother “still lived on within her” [69]), it is when she is described as an old woman that we should begin to suspect that Elisabeth is a representation of the narrator's own mother. The horrifying characterization of Elisabeth as “a madwoman [who] hunc[s] over a dead child” (67), captures, with its characterization of her as mad, and with its link to a child's death, exactly the experience of a child who fears s/he will be destroyed by his/her angry mother.

So, too, does pretty much the entirety of part two, as it chronicles Elisabeth's relationship to Paul when, as a consequence of his trying to individuate, Elisabeth “fear[s] that Paul had turned against her and was deliberately avoiding her” (107). While true that she is described as tenderly mothering him (she, for example, “drie[s] his tears, kisse[s] him, [and] tuck[s] him up” [119]), and as directing her “killer instincts” (119) onto others, she ultimately plans to use her “two weapons—death and oblivion” (148)—to destroy them both. Death is means for her to possess Paul forever, while life, growth, continuously opposes her plans. And while it is Dargelos's poison which eventually slays him, given the number of times Elisabeth is referred to as a poisonous

spider in part two, we may have trouble not somehow believing that mad-“mother” Elisabeth is really the one responsible for the death of her “child,” Paul.

But if those who experience extreme parental sadism tend to displace its origin onto others, then what explains Andrea’s Ashworth’s capacity to so frankly portray her stepfather’s own killer instincts? Assuming that the narrator of *Les Enfants Terribles* was once in Paul’s position, and assuming that Elisabeth represents Paul’s mother, one accounting for her strength may lie in Andrea’s differing from Paul in having had another parent upon whom she could count on for support. However, the marked binary that Andrea sets up, with her mother as hero and her step-father as villain, may reflect the same need to displace hostility away from a parent that the narrator of *Les Enfants Terrible* demonstrates.

Early in her account, Andrea’s mother and stepfather are polar opposites: Peter is brutal, a villain, while her mother is kind, a helpful guardian. Peter pounds upon his family with “his hairy fist[s]” (18), brutally beating up both Andrea and her mother. He is a savage bully, an “ogre,” whose close resemblance would be found amongst the villainry in the book of fairy-tales he rips up. And Andrea’s mother is described as the sort of person who trips-up ogres’ intentions to mash up their prey. Just as Del was expected to look at her uncle’s corpse, Andrea is told by a guide to look at a “nasty ogre” (27), hidden in the cave’s shadows. And while Del’s mother was agitated and combative, Andrea’s mother soothes her child by tenderly squeezing her hand, and asking her,

“Well, who wants to see an ogre?” (27). Andrea knows her mother would help defend her against ogres, and she does, telling Peter, “Not in front of the girls!” while her “head whipped back like a doll’s” (49) from being hit by him; and also later when she directs the knife-wielding Peter’s attention onto herself, telling him, “[t]his isn’t about the girls” (66).

But while Andrea’s mother defiantly declares that Peter would “not lay a finger on them [her children]” (11), given that her stepfather had beaten her up the night before, Andrea also knows that her mother had not been able to prevent Peter from doing so. Knowing how much this truth would overwhelm her mother, Andrea protects her by not telling her about the abuse. She may, however, with her reluctance to explore why her mother frequently allows back into the home partners who beat up her children, also here be protecting herself from seriously engaging the likelihood that her mother not only at some level knows about the abuse but actually *encourages* it. She certainly shows us instances where her mother—shown to behave so differently than she did previously with Peter—aligns herself with Terry and betrays her children’s need for support. She tells us her sisters believed her mother had “betrayed” (228) them, but Andrea, speaking with more textual authority than her younger sisters are permitted, establishes them as simply in error about this.

But while Andrea likely displaces and rationalizes her mother’s hostility, there are signs in her text that show she suspects her mother is indeed “greedy for her hurt.” For instance, the importance of Andrea’s schooling as her means

of escaping an oppressive, dangerous—potentially even deadly—home life, is made clear in the text. And Andrea chooses to place her mother's decision to move to Manchester—where there are no grammar schools—just one page after she informs us of her admittance to Lancashire Grammar (99-100). The dangers that await one in poor neighborhoods are overtly presented in the text too, and, just one page after describing an incident where a man tried to stab her, Andrea tells us of her mother's decision to move where a "poor lass got dragged down [. . .] and raped" (153). However, there is always enough wiggle-room provided in her text that if we (and/or she) would prefer to understand her mother's motives as essentially benign, we are able to do so without too much difficulty.

Andrea's mother is, by the end of Andrea's account, a more ambiguous figure than she was at the beginning, but she is no ogre. If Andrea's mother retains some of the heroic status at the end of the account she had at the beginning, doubtless this is because, despite her periods of withdrawal during Andrea's adolescence, she often was, or at least clearly wanted to be, available to help her. However, it is also likely that Andrea needed to have someone who could defend her against all the perils associated with living in a "house on fire," and to some extent created this person in her narrative. The narrator of *Les Enfants Terribles* may do the same thing when, despite the frequent comparisons made between Elisabeth and monstrous things, he also likens her to "a captain on a bridge" (69), and to "a merciful judge" (114)—

that is, to an enfranchised individual who might help rather than destroy him. If we allow ourselves to imagine, to remember how terrifying our own parents' sadism was to us as children, indeed, how it made us feel as if they wanted us dead, we can better appreciate just how brave their attempts to explore it, to face it, are. As for Del, who looks to God but can stare Death right in the face, she is the sort of hero we all might want to look to for support.

Works Cited

- Ashworth, Andrea. *Once in a House on Fire*. London: Picador, 1998. Print.
- Cocteau, Jean. *Les Enfants Terribles*. Trans. Rosamond Lehmann. Toronto: Penguin, 1961. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. *The Emotional Life of Nations*. New York: Institute for Psychohistory, 2002. Print.
- Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. Toronto: Penguin, 1996. Print.
- Rheingold, Joseph. *The Mother, Anxiety, and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*. London: Little, Brown, 1967. Print.

Marcher's Merger (March 2003)

At the end of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," John Marcher decides that he has done nothing with his life, but the truth is that he had once accomplished something noteworthy, namely, he acquired an autonomous identity for himself, only this acquisition did not come cheap. The price Marcher pays for individuating is his suspicion, his fear, that he is fated for an encounter with a Beast, quite capable of destroying him. He pretends to hunt the Beast, but since he likely feels he deserves to be struck down by its attack, fears of retribution have him thinking more of evasion and reparation than of combat. So even though it will mean the loss of the considerable bounty individuation provided him with, Marcher ultimately decides to return to a symbiotic relationship with someone he felt he had once terribly wronged, in hopes that he might thereby forestall catastrophe.

The Beast arrives at the end of the story, and Marcher crumbles in face of such a terror, but when we first encounter

him he fends off "beasts" quite ably and is no ordinary man. At Weatherend, he finds himself amongst a crowd so "wild" and "acquisit[ive]" that Marcher cannot avoid finding it "disconcerting" (62). He calls its constituents "dog sniffing," but composed of "heads [which] nodded quite as with the emphasis of an excited sense of smell" (61), they seem more like a hydra, more like one enveloping mass than an ensemble of particular beasts. It resembles in its uncontrolled aggressive desires and neediness what Margaret Mahler suggests is characteristic of the symbiotic milieu—that is, the child's original "undifferentiat[ed] [. . .] fusion with mother, in which the "I" is not yet differentiated from the "not-I," [. . .] [and which] contains an undifferentiated mixture of libido and aggression" (9). However, though Marcher registers their presence, he remains someone who more "observe[s]" (62) its tendencies than is affected by them. He is more master than subject, for he is, as Gert Buelens argues, in "possession of an ego that is sharply differentiated from that of others, to the point of lending one 'distinction' [a word that carries the double meaning of separateness and superiority]" (18). He therefore is not only safe from the dissolution of one's singular identity, one's self control, from returning to mental states established in our early childhood that a crowd effects upon its constituents (Main 64), but is exactly someone those still mired in a symbiotic state would want and hope to become.

Of course, it is likely that the typical modern would prefer to be more the rugged individualist than the isolated

cosmopolitan, but Marcher manages something quite enviable in acquiring his own private sense of self. For individuation is scary, not only because it means the unknown but because it often means incurring the loss of what sustained us in our very first encounters with a brand new world: our parents' love. More specifically, since "at the beginning of life we have a disposition to anxiety and an extraordinary perceptiveness of maternal attitude affecting our survival" (Rheingold 89), it means the intolerable loss of our mothers' love. As Lloyd DeMause explains:

[I]mmature mothers and fathers [that is, mothers and fathers who themselves were not reacted to warmly, affectionately by their own parents] expect their child to give them the love they missed when they were children, and therefore experience the child's independence as rejection. Mothers in particular have had extremely traumatic developmental histories throughout history; one cannot severely neglect and abuse little girls and expect them to magically turn into good mothers when they grow up. [. . .] The moment the infant needs something or turns away from her to explore the world, it triggers her own memories of maternal rejection. When the infant cries, the immature mother hears her mother, her father, her siblings, and her spouse screaming at her. She then "accuses the infant of being unaffectionate, unrewarding and selfish . . . as not interested in me"

[Brazelton and Cramer 11]. All growth and individuation by the child is therefore experienced as rejection. "When the mother cannot tolerate the child's being a separate person with her own personality and needs, and demands instead that the child mirror her, separation becomes heavily tinged with basic terror for the child" [255]. (151)

Though we can't be sure of what Marcher's childhood was like, he behaves in ways which accord with what we would expect of someone whose mother viewed her son's self-growth with suspicion and anger. Of the adult fate of such a child, we would, for example, expect him to either live selflessly or to do his very, very best to convince himself this is how he has been living. And, indeed, Marcher admits that his aim is to live in such a way that he might "regard himself, in a greedy, world, as [. . .] unselfish" (78), and toward this end tries to live "colourless[ly]" and generously (he attends to the needs of those purportedly no less "unsettled" [78] than he is). He individuates, but tries to convince himself that his enabling autonomy, his precious "organic identity" (78), arose from constant self-sacrifice, and is therefore proof of his selflessness not his selfishness in life.

But Marcher hasn't been as good as all that, for he individuated by making use of a "greedy world" and by associating with the grandiose. He prefers not to think of himself as "acquisiti[ve]" (62), but his autonomy was very likely facilitated by his acquisition of a whole "new" set of

“friends” (63) and by repeatedly associating himself with far away places such as Rome, the “Palace of the Caesars” (65). His familiarity with his new friends makes those who remind him of old ones—in particular, May Bartram—difficult to become reacquainted with (67), and his familiarity with places where patriarch-fathers once ruled challenges the influence of his original dwelling place, the maternal home. Considering how many readers complain of Marcher’s selfishness, it is clear to most of us that he has been fulfilling his own needs as much as those of others, and given his hypersensitive response to Bartram’s suggestion that he wants something “all to [him]self” (73), Marcher likely knows he has been as well. He tells her, “It isn’t a question of what I ‘want’—God knows I don’t want anything” (73)—but it is in fact for “sin[ning] in that direction” (90) that he feels so strongly that something which “could possibly [. . .] annihilate [. . .] [him]” would “suddenly break out in [his] [. . .] life” (72). And since “fears of growth, individuation, and self-assertion that carry threatening feelings of disintegration lead to desires to merge with the omnipotent mother—literally to crawl back into the womb” (DeMause 94)—Marcher’s fears lead him to desire a return to a symbiotic state.

The Weatherend estate, a remainder, with its “old wainscots, old tapestr[ies], old gold, old colour[s]” (64), with its intense “poet[ic] and histor[ic]” resonance from a once-familiar and affecting effete past, is an appropriate site to “stage” (67) his re-emersion into a maternally dominated environment. May Bartram, so familiar with “the dates of the

building [i.e., Weatherend], the styles of the furniture, the authorship of the pictures” (63), that the ghosts thought to haunt the great rooms might envy her familiarity with the place, who is “a part of the establishment” (63), is an appropriate person to serve as the representation of his mother returned. And so strong is his need to initiate symbiosis, that though Marcher encounters Bartram as someone who can “stray apart [so as to] feel in a proper relation” (62) to her “home,” when she chooses to “drift toward [and talk to] him” (63), he quickly permits the loss of his composure and self-command in her presence. Though Marcher first boasts that “[h]er face and her voice [were] [. . .] all at his service now” (64), he soon “falter[s] [and] [. . .] fears he should only give himself away” (69), and eventually suggests he has “complete[ly] surrender[ed]” (72) himself to her.

Marcher’s surrender to Bartram means “surrendering the source of his superior uniqueness to a power that is located outside himself” (Buelens 20). It means the loss of his most prized possession, and Buelens is probably right to suggest that only “part of Marcher craves such a surrender of the autonomous self” (20). But even if part of him still struggles against such a loss, Bartram, who senses Marcher’s desire to have “something all to [himself]” (73), contrives means to ensure the totality of her dominance over him. Since Marcher’s independence was supported by the establishment of temporal and spatial distinctions between himself and his mother and childhood home, Bartram fuses herself into his

sense of the intermittent years that have separated them so that Marcher comes to think that “[h]e hadn’t been” “alone a bit” (71). Since his independence was facilitated by linking himself to places with hypermasculine associations, she shifts their meeting place from the patriarchal home of the Caesars to Pompeii, a place subject to catastrophic dissolution and destruction (and a reminder of the Roman Empire’s own collapse). Bartram thereby collapses his preferred sense of himself as upright, independent, and respectable, and Marcher begins to suspect he is and always has been an “ass” (68). He still hopes he might in fact be a “hero” (88), but has become so dependent on another’s ostensible high opinion of him for some self-worth that he will be little more than a captive for the duration of the time he spends by Bartram’s side.

As Bartram now dominates and determines Marcher’s present and future existence, it is appropriate, with the acquisition of her inheritance, that she no longer is isolated and contained at ancestral Weatherend. She acquires a small home in London, and Marcher will come to know this home intimately and exhaustingly. We feel the weariness, the redundancy of his life there when we are told he “had turned once more about the little drawing-room to which, year after year, he brought his inevitable topic,” and when we are told that “generations of his nervous moods had been at work there” (86). These nervous moods are not, however, the product of his fears of a catastrophic visitation. Having returned to a symbiotic state, having returned to a mother-

figure, those fears have been squelched: Marcher had “lost [his] [. . .] sense” (88) of danger, and “his original fear [. . .] ha[d] [been] lost” (87). What Marcher experiences is neurosis. Its cause—lengthy confinement. His new home is as confining as a cage, as a tomb. And Bartram herself is not so much “his kind wise keeper” (81) as she is the grim reaper of his adult life and identity.

The narrator may think of her as something nearly as ghastly. He calls Bartram a “sphinx” (98), and later, a “creature” (120). In these instances he purportedly isn’t trying to be critical of Bartram, nor to link her to the Beast which hunts Marcher, but throughout his narrative he describes Bartram in a manner which cannot help but have us thinking of her as akin to the Beast. For example, when he describes Marcher considering whether he should allow “a lady” to “accompany” him “on a tiger-hunt,” that is, when he describes Marcher considering whether he will permit Bartram to share his “obsession,” we are told that Marcher’s concern was, that the “definite [sticking] point” was, the “inevitable spring of the creature” (79), and the damage it might cause her. The Beast, therefore, is something which springs and punctures—and so too is Bartram, who just a few sentences before was described as someone who, with her “penetrating questions[s],” caused the particular relationship she shares with Marcher to “spring into being” (79).

Since Bartram is the Beast itself, that is, his chosen representative of the vengeful mother who inspired his fears of a catastrophic visitation, Marcher ought to be more

concerned with the trouble he invites upon himself by bringing her along than the trouble he thereby invites upon her. And he likely is. Just after Marcher makes an early attempt to characterize the nature of Bartram's attendance to him as her accompanying him (79)—which will later settle in Marcher's mind as her "watch[ing] with him" (82)—the narrator tells us at length about the effects of Bartram "watching him" (80). She watches him, we are told, "in silence," "because people watch [. . .] best [. . .] in silence" (80). Watching in silence over her prey suits a tiger pretty well too, of course, and as if feeling himself stalked prey, Marcher shows signs of nervousness. In response to reflecting on "all the looking at his life, judging it, measuring it" over the "consecration of [. . .] years," we are told that Marcher almost suspects that Bartram has special designs on him, that there is something peculiar in her interest in him: "she almost set him wondering if she hadn't even a larger conception of singularity for him than he had for himself" (80).

Bartram's eyes—very likely "the very eyes of the Beast" (87)—become conspicuously present in the narrative as soon as Marcher and Bartram become attached to one another. Indeed, though Bartram and Marcher become isolated at the "margins" (83) of society, possessing a close, exclusive relationship that resembles in its exclusivity the bond between a mother and her young child, they seem part of their dyad. Their conspicuousness is appropriate in a story which explores a regression to a child-like state, because we first come to know our mother's approval and disapproval

through non-verbal signals (DeMause 151). And while Marcher is concerned that "the light in [Bartram's] [. . .] eyes" (70) might communicate sarcasm and mockery (70, 72), they do not, at first, because Marcher is very much a prodigal son returned to keep her company. But her eyes, potentially both "cold" and "sweet" (105), become for him the "evil eye[s]" (116), the eyes that disapprove, and finally, the "eyes that didn't know him" (118), the eyes that will abandon him as he prepares to leave her side.

We are never told that Marcher actually wants to leave Bartram, but we have reason to suspect he has been gauging what it would cost to leave her behind, guilt-free, from the moment of their re-union. Unfortunately, an adult often conceives of his or her individuation as so massive a crime that the cost is astronomically, outrageously high: he estimated he "had endless gratitude to make up" (71) to her. He will weather years of caged pacing (which had worn down the carpets much like the "desks in old counting-houses are worn by the elbows of generations of clerks" [86]), and, almost like a criminal before a parole board, hope that he has demonstrated sufficient penitence to warrant release. But since she has no intention of releasing him, she responds to his claim that her "curiosity isn't being [. . .] repaid" (85) by insisting that she expects she "will be [. . .] repaid" (86), but, alas, that that time had not yet come.

Bartram proves as effective in ensuring Marcher never succeeds in justifying his departure from her as she was in ensuring his dependence upon her. Her close affiliation with

him, for example, has negatively affected how people view her, and therefore not only adds more guilt to the “hump on [his] [. . .] back” (79) but simultaneously reduces the number of men he might slough her off on. Marcher knows that if he conceived of Bartram’s interest in him as selfishly, as opposed to unselfishly, motivated, he would have a way out, for “if she had been a totally different” woman and had made a “claim on him” (68), he would understand separation from her as perfectly justified. But Bartram, when she distinguishes Marcher from those men who have a “capacity to spend endless time with dull women” (84), takes care to distinguish herself from the sort of women Marcher could more readily imagine owing little to. And so even though he well knows how pleasurable and empowering it is to be the one who listens rather than the one who *needs* to be listened to (78), since Bartram’s machinations are not countered by a capacity on his part to conceive of her as impurely motivated, he remains for an intolerably lengthy time “the only food for her [the tiger Beast’s] mind” (90).

But Marcher did individuate from his mother, and Bartram senses that he is finally near-prepared to separate from her as well. We know this principally because she inflicts upon him the worst sort of punishment imaginable, the punishment that (immature) mothers inflict upon their children for daring to leave them—namely, a mother’s abandonment, her rejection. This is the same punishment for fear of which Marcher reunited with a mother-figure in the first place. It is the same threat which made him have feelings

of catastrophic annihilation, and the threat still kows him: “made [to] feel strangely abandoned” by “Bartram communicat[ing] with him as [if] across a gulf,” Marcher is afraid to “speak the wrong word” (99). We are soon made aware of just how much Bartram’s rejection concerns and affects Marcher. We hear that “withdrawal [was] imposed on him” (107), that “she had deceived him” (108), that “she dismissed him” (109), that “access to her [. . .] was almost wholly forbidden him” (114), that “[n]ot only had her interest failed him, but he seemed to feel himself unattended” (115), and that, after starting off on a current together (76), Marcher was “too helplessly at sea” (110). And though there are signs, as when he eventually braves telling her, “you abandon me” (103), that Marcher will brave her punishment and force his way free of her, Marcher’s escape is ultimately only brought about by Bartram’s demise.

After her death we are told that Marcher begins a “hunt” for “[t]he lost stuff of consciousness [which had become] [. . .] for him as a strayed or stolen child to an unappeasable father” (117). Marcher hunts, tries to recover, the lost stuff of consciousness he had most prized—his independent ego. He lost it by reuniting with the mother-figure Bartram, by turning to a representative of his mother, and could not recover it owing to her unappeasable need for attendance and love. Marcher, however, would not mind being likened to a father, for Marcher needs to restore the masculine supports that had earlier assisted his development of an independent identity. And it is therefore no surprise that Marcher travels and visits

the “temples of gods and the sepulchres of kings” (119), that is, that he once again, though this time with Pharaohs, associates with them. Only afterwards does he revisit Bartram’s grave.

There we are told he was reminded that he had “once lived” and was “dependent on [the sense of this] not alone for a support but for an identity” (121). But though the narrator tries to convince us that Marcher’s return to traveling, to mobility, and to sites associated with patriarchs had little effect upon him, that he in fact “turned for nobleness of association” (120) towards Bartram’s grave, Marcher relearned *abroad* what it was to have lived and to possess an identity he would prefer not to lose. For when he returns home to visit Bartram’s grave we are told that “[t]he plot of ground, the graven tablet, the tended flowers affected him so as belonging to him that he resembled for the hour a contented landlord reviewing a piece of property” (120). We are reminded of the crowd at Weatherend, with their wild dreams of acquisition; we are reminded of how he once stood amongst them, a man of distinction; and understand that Marcher has again become someone whose stature makes Bartram “all at his service now” (64).

So though its importance is played down in the text, Marcher likely journeyed to the Egyptian desert in hopes that the echoing sounds of “the past glories of Pharaohs” (119) would counter the results of Bartram’s sphinx-like silent presence. And they do, but rediscovering his independence will also mean an eventual return of the terrible fear—again, a

fear he had lost while in Bartram’s attendance—of being punished for possessing it. For Bartram told a mistruth when she speculated that Marcher had lost his fear because he had “[l]iv[ed] with it for so long” (87). Instead, the fear, in a sense, left him—for as long as he was willing to abandon his claim to his own life. Though his fear was not “lost in a desert” (87), for visiting the land of the Pharaohs and for once again beginning the process of individuation, he once again finds himself terrified by the prospect of the Beast’s lunge. So much so that when he “perceive[s] [. . .] by a stir of the air” the “huge and hideous” Beast “rise,” in order to avoid it, he once again returns to the mother-figure Bartram—this time by “fl[inging] himself, face down on [her] [. . .] tomb” (127).

The narrator’s description of the Beast’s leap at the end of the story gives us a sense of the sort of truly terrifying visitation for fear of which Marcher reunited to a mother-figure in the first place. Given that linking himself to Bartram forestalled its arrival, we should understand just why someone would choose to enter a relationship that would shear him of his preferred sense of self. But most critics of “The Beast in the Jungle” are not inclined to sympathize with Marcher. Instead, they judge him cruelly insensitive to Bartram, and rise to her defence.

A few scholars are trying to establish that Bartram does little to warrant a sympathetic reaction, but their efforts to influence the preferred sense of her may be frustrated by the inclination of readers to conceive of her as saintly. Gert Buelens, one of the critics intent on “dethroning May

Bartram" (18), is also one aware that this requires something more than pointing to the abundant textual evidence which illustrates her sadism and greed. When he writes that "the most common readings" (17) of Bartram are "*suspiciously* close to Marcher's [own] perception of her throughout the story" (18; emphasis added), he clearly senses that critics seem near compelled to accept Marcher's high estimation of Bartram's worth and his low estimation of his own; and, if we recognize their relationship as one between mother and son, many of us *may in fact be drawn* to praise Bartram and to criticize Marcher, for we are "enjoined to show love for the mother, and failure to do so carries a threat, for the child must protect the mother's defenses against her perception, and the perception by others, of her lack of motherly feeling or her hostile impulses. One *must* love his mother, or perish, or at least suffer guilt" (Rheingold 201; emphasis in original). When we praise Bartram, we establish her blamelessness, and since she represents our own mothers, we thereby feel less deserving of persecution. When we criticize Marcher we are trying to distinguish ourselves from his own self-centeredness, but are actually imitating his manner of establishing his own moral purity. Since many of us, unfortunately, *are* like Marcher, in that we inhibit "the fulfillment of [our] [. . .] emotional needs and wants [so as to avoid] [. . .] some unspeakable punishment or tragedy" (Branden 97), Marcher will likely receive a more sympathetic reaction only when fewer of us share his fear that our own self-growth has earned us a catastrophic visit by the Beast.

Works Cited

- Bell, Millicent. *Meaning in Henry James*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991. Print.
- Branden, Nathaniel. *Honoring the Self: The Psychology of Confidence and Respect*. New York: Bantam, 1985. Print.
- Buelens, Gert. "In Possession of a Secret: Rhythms of Mastery and Surrender in "The Beast in the Jungle'." *The Henry James Review* 19.1 (1998): 17-35. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. "The Evolution of Childrearing." *The Journal of Psychohistory* 28.4 (Spring 2001): 362-451. Print.
- . "The Psychogenic Theory of History." *The Emotional Life of Nations*. New York: The Institute for Psychohistory, 2002. 10 March 2003. Web.
- . "War as Righteous Rape and Purification." *The Emotional Life of Nations*.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *Tender is the Night*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. Print.
- Heyns, Michiel. "The Double Narrative of the 'The Beast in the Jungle'. Ethical Plot, Ironical Plot and the Play of Power." *Enacting History in Henry James: Narrative, Power and Ethics*. Ed. Gert Buelens. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 109-25. Print.
- Izzo, Donatella. *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. Print.
- James, Henry. "The Beast in the Jungle." *The Novels and Tales*

of *Henry James* New York Edition, Volume XVII. New York: Charles Scribner, 1090. Print.

Koenigsberg, Richard A. *Symbiosis and Separation: Towards a Psychology of Culture*. New York: The Library of Art and Social Science, 1989. Print.

Leitch, Vincent B. et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001. Print.

Mahler, Margaret. "Aggression in the Service of Separation-Individuation." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 50 (1981): 631-52. Print.

Main, Tom. "Some Psychodynamics of Large Groups." *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy*. Ed. Lionel Dreeger. London: Karnac, 64-86.

Rheingold, Joseph C. *The Mother, Anxiety, and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967. Print.

Scribner, Charles III. Introduction. *Tender is the Night*. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. iv-xv. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve K. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990. Print.

Weston, Marisa Dillon. "Anorexia as a Symbol of an Empty Matrix Dominated by the Dragon Mother." *Group Analysis* 32 (1999): 71-85. Print.

Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993. Print.

Privileging Marlow (June 2003)

Johanna Smith, in "‘Too Beautiful Altogether’: Ideologies of Gender and Empire in *Heart of Darkness*," argues that Marlow is attempting to revitalize what had become an outdated conception of separate spheres. According to Smith, Marlow is an ideologue who presents his listeners with a new Kurtzian imperialism, in hopes of challenging and helping replace a feminine one. If Smith is correct in her suspicions, she certainly overemphasizes Marlow's skill as a craftsman and his effectiveness as a spokesman, for his uneasiness with women is obvious in the text, and so too his ineptness in confining women away: he creates separate spheres wherein the masculine one notably includes at least one woman! But in his narrative, imperialism never loses a taint of feminine acquisitiveness, just as "influence" never seems to lose its taint as a feminine power. In fact, given his typical response to compromising situations, it is more accurate to assess Marlow as having far more used his privileged position as narrator to make himself seem a skillful evader than an

imperialistic Darth Vader.

Marlow's fascination with and fear of the power and influence of women is more evident in the text than Smith appreciates. Smith, hoping to emphasize the relevance of feminist analysis, prefers to imagine Marlow as a dangerous opponent. To her, Marlow is effective in construing women as essentially weak and delicate. His power, she tells us, "as the masculine narrator of *his* story" (Smith 173; emphasis in original), allows him to effectively silence, commodify, and belittle the women in his tale, and only the likes of discursive analytical training, of feminist criticism, will enable us to effectively counter his "narrative aim to 'colonize' and 'pacify' women" (170). Considering the surety of Smith's understanding of Marlow's intentions, and her high estimation of his competence, it is not surprising that Smith passes over evidence that discounts her thesis.

Smith believes Marlow is attempting to reinforce an ideology of separate spheres that was losing its influence by the late nineteenth-century. She believes he is attempting to create an ideology that establishes women as incapable of accepting and/or handling the purportedly hard truths of reality. Yet the first encounter we have in the text (other than with Marlow) with someone whose significant presence owes to her experience with truths of this kind, is the old woman at the Company's Brussels office. She knows that few of the men that come before her will survive their experiences abroad. She seems "uncanny and fateful" (25), and makes Marlow very uncomfortable. Smith rightly recognizes the old

woman's associations with one of the three Fates, but does not convincingly explain why Marlow, if he means to establish women as ignorant and incapable of handling Truth, would permit a figure whose Fate-like ability to divine men's future is never really belittled in the text. The old woman's callous attitude towards young men is characterized as a realistic and legitimate response to the fate she knows awaits most of those she meets. And it is an attitude that Marlow adopts, and is delighted to mimic, in his own treatment of his attendees onboard the *Nellie* (50) (and also while in the jungle, resulting in the pilgrims "considering him brutally callous" [87]).

Smith passes too quickly over another surprising association Marlow allows the old woman. Smith reminds us that Marlow portrays her as someone who "'pilot[s] young men into the Company,'" and suggests that she is being likened to "the pilot who ferries the dead across the Styx into Hades" (175). Smith is aware that if there is an almost reliably exclusive masculine fraternity in the novel it is the brotherhood of seamen (182), of empowered loners, yet does not explore why Marlow, in effect, includes her within this fraternity! Comparing her to someone who successfully ferries doomed souls to the most hellish of places is an especially strange thing for Marlow to do if his intention was to argue that women are simply too delicate to venture abroad.

To be fair, Smith argues that Marlow attempts to "stabilize his masculinity," a masculinity she recognizes was

threatened by the old woman in his relations to his aunt (and also the Intended) (176). She tells us that in his “farewell visit to his aunt, he abuses her lack of experience and debased imperialist rhetoric to construct the ‘sentimental presence’ that can be distinguished from an ‘idea’ and then rejected” (178). Smith, in understanding his encounter with his aunt as one where he uses *her*, does not allow that it could also be one where *he too* was used. Marlow himself describes his aunt as “triumphant” (27), and it *is* possible to read him as more reactive than active, as more a victim than a victimizer in this scene, and to judge his cutting after-the-fact commentary as mostly compensatory in nature.

Certainly it is an encounter in which his aunt’s influence and power in the Company—and potentially over him—is made clear to Marlow, and it is also one in which his aunt has both the tonal authority and assumed right to dominate a dependent attendee we would expect from a matriarch. When Marlow quotes her exact wording, we hear her patronizing tone, her presumed authority: “You forget, dear Charlie [—]” (27). As with the old woman, Marlow feels uncomfortable in her presence (27). This rebuke follows Marlow’s resisting her—whether simply her idealistic beliefs as we are told, or the entirety of her authority over him, we cannot be sure. His quibble with her views, assuming we trust Marlow’s account of this encounter, was delicately, even meekly delivered: “I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit” (27). It is certainly not clear that his delicacy here owed mostly to civility, or out of respect of his aunt’s own delicate nature.

Rather more likely, it owed to his trying to figure out a way to contest her authority, but without thereby inviting upon himself a lecture. That is, he might have moderated his delivery mostly out of fear of reprisals than for any other reason. As it turns out, for his nanoscale show of impudence, he is patronized, lectured at, told to “wear flannel, [and to] be sure to write,” and afterwards is left feeling “queer” (27) and uneasy.

Marlow’s after-the-fact commentary on the supposed absurd nature of women shows he continues to be disturbed by this encounter as he recalls it. His diatribe reeks of retroactive compensation, as if he were *still* trying to counter the authority his aunt had over him. His assertions of female weakness are therefore compromised, and are hardly ideal for the project Smith believes they are intended to serve; for Marlow cannot well argue for separate spheres based on intrinsic female weakness and male hardiness when he as a man consistently showcases the failings from his own fear and weakness.

Not only does Marlow not manage to stabilize his masculinity in the presence of his aunt, his aunt, more so than even the old woman, continues to “bewitch” (38) his existence in Africa. While Smith misses who really has authority in Marlow’s encounter with his aunt, she is right to assume Marlow hoped his being keen to the true materialistic drive behind imperialism privileged him in some way. But even in Africa he finds that it is only his “dear aunt’s influential acquaintances” (41) which enables. The manager’s

agent, the brickmaker, erroneously believes Marlow possesses “influences in Europe” (42), and it is Marlow who recognizes his aunt as the source of his inflated reputation. He tells us that he “let the young fool [. . .] believe anything he liked to imagine as to [his] [. . .] influences [. . .], [but that he also] [. . .] thereby became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims” (42). And it is possible that the reason he compares himself to the bewitched pilgrims is that, despite his denial that there was anyone “behind” (43) him, he knows his aunt’s influence over him remains, that it is substantial, and that it presents him with tantalizing benefits.

The brickmaker, after all, likens Marlow to Kurtz (41). He believes him Kurtz’s potential competition for General Manager, that is, a rival, a potential equal. And while Marlow, so often forced to bite his tongue, finds nothing more appealing about Kurtz than his “impudence” (47), Kurtz can get away with being impudent only because his connections in Europe make him seem ear-marked for General Manager (41). Kurtz’s connections give him some immunity to reprisals (from rivals at least), so his insulting letters to the Central Station’s manager have not affected his star status. Since European capitals are characterized as effeminate places (88), Kurtz’s connections link him, if not to female relations, certainly to effeminate men. If Marlow permitted himself to make use of his aunt’s connections, he would likely become as empowered as Kurtz, or the person Kurtz directly rebuked—the Central Station’s manager—is. However, he is also aware that he would owe his status to his aunt’s efforts,

and that this dependence would render him pathetic. He would have power over others, but would conceive of himself as more his aunt’s pet than as someone in charge of a large swath of others. We know this because of the special interest Marlow takes in the manager’s special “boy” (37), and by the way Marlow characterizes the Central Station’s manager.

Other than the brickmaker, the only person at the Central Station who is favored by the manager is “his ‘boy’—an overfed young negro from the coast,” who is to Marlow a despicable figure who “treats the white men, under [the manager’s] [. . .] very eyes, with provoking insolence” (37). The negro’s insolence owes only to his being the manager’s “favourite” (37), and we should not be surprised to discover that the manager is in significant ways a composite of the old woman and Marlow’s aunt. As with the old woman, as with his aunt, the manager is someone Marlow isolates as being able to make others feel uneasy (37) (and he tells us, “You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be” [37]). It was the old woman’s looks’ “swift and indifferent placidity” (25) that affected Marlow, while it is the “trenchant and heavy” (36) manager’s gaze that affects him. Just as he characterizes his aunt (and women in general), Marlow describes the manager as existing in a bubble:

When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special

house had to be built. This was the station's mess-room. Where he sat was the first place—the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. (37)

Like his aunt, the manager expects, demands, and, other than with Kurtz, receives dutiful attendance. And as was also true with her, “he paid no attention to [. . .] [Marlowe's] explanations” (37).

Marlow comes close to *literally* running away from the manager. He saves his scathing commentary of him until “he flung out of his [the manager's] hut” (38). Running away, or turning “his back on” (38) those who unnerve him, is as frequent a response of Marlow's to feeling uncomfortable as is back-biting commentary. The two reactions usually go together, in fact. He doesn't fling himself away from his aunt (mind you, as Smith points out, he goes to Africa as much in hopes of distancing himself from the influence of women [176] as to travel to the heart of the jungle), but he feels the sudden need to inform his listeners of how well “used to clear[ing] out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice [he was], with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street” (27). His reaction to the Central Station manager is typical in that most often when feeling compromised, he does nothing tricky, he just physically moves away. However, to counter a connection he “acknowledges” between men of the power-hungry Company and their appetite for lies and his own (“Well, I went near

enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretense as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims” [44]), he does finally demonstrate what sort of power his entitled position as narrator affords him by *imagining* himself very far beyond them.

After admitting to some kinship, Marlow returns to the present to lecture his attendees onboard the Nellie. In this instance, he escapes becoming tainted—by traveling through time! He makes use of his narrative power to help persuade himself that, however much he might admit to being a liar, as perhaps akin in some way to Company men, what he still *most truly is* is a voyager, part of an untainted ancient brotherhood who have remained stalwart and the same since now vastly altered England was herself primordial. To seamen, it is the accomplishments of the human short-term that are unsubstantial. So too, even, the appeals of “secrets of a whole continent” (19). His return to the present is a return then to himself as a “trustworthy” “pilot” (17), to someone used by the unnamed narrator to represent—even if, owing to his wanderings, he isn't typical of them (17)—*all other seamens'* learned incuriosity, even before the most extravagant of discoveries, and is a technique of his (Marlow's) to escape becoming contaminated by prurience.

Upon his return from his remembrances, and immediately after he finishes relating his encounter with the brickmaker, Marlow tells his listeners he sought “comfort” (44) onboard his boat. More than this, he tells us/them of his

associations with “the few mechanics there were in that station,” who, owing to their “imperfect manners,” were “despised” by the Company pilgrims (44); and of how he also pals-about with a “good worker” (44). Marlow takes pleasure in isolating himself from the Company men by both sharing and identifying himself with the few honest souls around him. Amongst people too “unimportant” (44) to draw attention, too “simple” (44) to be interesting to those fascinated with intrigues and mysteries, but seemingly unaffected by others’ opinion of them, Marlow is happy. It is possible that, more than anything else, the search for such simple happiness is what drives Marlow’s narrative. There is no doubt that women trouble him, and that they are construed in the narrative as dangerous. There can also be no doubt that he would be delighted if his narrative contributed to keeping men empowered over them. However, he idealizes the peripheral loner so much in the text, while condemning influence and power, that he does not establish any clear means whereby any man or company of men could succeed in constraining women without thereby demonstrating “unbounded” (178) feminine power and impudence.

Smith is correct that Kurtz’s “unbounded eloquence” (176) delights Marlow; but just as Marlow is willing to admit he “was seduced into something like admiration” (71) for the significantly less impressive Russian attendant to Kurtz, it does not necessarily implicate him in holding a high assessment of this sundered man’s over-all worth. Marlow’s own manliness, despite his at times pretending to be immune

to continental attractions, actually ultimately depends on his success in resisting them. He knows that Kurtz’s eloquence makes him great; but also that it is entwined with a suspect desire for impudent self-assertion that ultimately is not distinguished from an unbounded and tragic desire for “success and power” (85). Marlow is therefore serious when he claims he is “not prepared to affirm the fellow [Kurtz] was exactly worth the life [a helmsman] [he] [. . .] lost in getting to him” (67). And Marlow is likely relieved, rather than saddened, to find that “[a]ll that had been Kurtz’s had passed of [his] [Marlow’s] [. . .] hands” (90). That is, Marlow, because it guarantees he will not suffer Kurtz’s fate, is glad Fate worked to circumscribe his influence.

Smith knows that what she labels as a Kurtzian imperialism is not something Marlow presents as arising out of the efforts of corruptible Kurtzs, but implausibly implies that it could arise of the “strength of [the] [. . .] homosocial bonds” (182) established between fellow helmsmen. That is, she thinks it will arise out of men who steer clear of power and whose virtues include the modesty of their ambitions and the narrowness of their focus. No kind of colonization is ultimately validated in the text. This includes Marlow’s commodification of the savage woman, as it brings to mind associations of the supposed insatiable desire of women for objects as much as it does the objectifying male gaze. And no hero is presented for leadership of any colonizing effort. This certainly applies to Marlow himself, who fears old women almost as much as he does his aunt, and whose sadistic

treatment of the Intended is obviously not evidence of male power but rather of cowardly retribution upon whatever unfortunate girl proved handy. (The Intended, one of the text's less intimidating female/feminine figures, is the woman he revenges himself upon for feeling consistently awkward in their presence.) Marlow might admire and sometimes imitate the brutality of the hunter, but he prefers to hide. He takes pleasure in imagining himself a small anonymous beetle (51), *and he is in fact* too small and inconsequential to warrant the extent of the attention of Smith's scrutinizing gaze.

Works Cited

- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Ross C. Murfin. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1996. Print.
- Smith, Johanna M. "'Too Beautiful Altogether': Ideologies of Gender and Empire in *Heart of Darkness*." *Heart of Darkness*.

Sinister Advances and Sweet Returns (July 2003)

John Keats tells his readers the story, in "Ode to a Grecian Urn," of a poet's (and maybe his own) attempt to ravish an urn—that is, to demonstrate the superior status of the spoken word, of the poetic mind in action, and of the poet, to a beautiful, lasting, but static object of sculptural/visual art. In the first three stanzas the poet conveys efficacy and superiority as he manipulates the "sweet" (4) urn and "its" images to service his own self-image. However, in promoting himself through his self-reflexive involvement with the plight of those frozen on the urn's surface, he is suddenly reminded of his own inescapable susceptibility to decay, and of his own inevitable demise. Reminded of his own need of a "friend" (44), of reassurances from someone/thing alien and superior to himself he could imagine having access to or as being linked to penultimate truths (to "eternity" [45]), in the closing stanza, the poet changes his intentions toward the urn. In the last stanza, that is, rather than ravish it, the poet attempts to restore to it the formidable powers of expression he had

previously downplayed and undermined.

The poet clearly wants us to imagine not only that a rivalry exists between the urn and himself, but that the outcome of this contest is undetermined. The urn, we are told in the very first line, is “still unravished.” We intuit that he means that the urn is *as yet* unravished—at least by its groom, “quietness” (1). Perhaps, we are encouraged to ask ourselves, with his rhyme, with his voice, the poet might yet accomplish what quietness could not—namely, a charged, oratorical, even “orgiastic” (Friedman 226) conquest of the beautiful urn.

In the first stanza the poet skillfully demonstrates how he can use figurative language to undermine (undress) the authority and prowess of (off of) the urn. The poet gives lip-service to the urn’s powers, and confesses the inability of his own rhyme to match the “sweet[ness]” (4) of its “express[ion]” (3), but his personification of the urn actually makes it mostly seem vulnerable and passive. By calling the urn a “foster-child” in the second line, he makes the urn seem abandoned, and thereby further emphasizes our sense of the urn as vulnerable. Further, he portrays it as a vulnerable *creation*, and thereby draws attention to the generative capacities of those who “birthed” it. When we are subsequently told that the urn “express[es] / A flowery tale” (3-4), the status of the urn as *the* story’s teller seems to us uncertain, unfixed, even unearned. If the tale originates in any one, is it not, we are prompted to ask, really the potter’s (s’) and/or the painter’s (s’) tale, told through the medium of *their* painted urn, as much as it is the urn’s proper? And, in making

the ostensible subject of the poem the urn’s beautiful tale and/or its capacity to tell a beautiful tale, we sense the urn’s dependency on the poet’s voice to convey its unseen beauty to us. Portrayed as both vulnerable and passive, we are encouraged to suspect the urn is merely a “shape[ly]” (5) body, “dressed” (34) up prettily. Personified, its identity amounts to that of a passive (“still” [1]) virgin “child” (2), vulnerable to ravishment, dressed up by long-lost parentage, and whose very dressings (i.e., its surface tale)—a perpetual source of discomfort: not only might the urn’s images not be the surface manifestation of its own tale, it might be an imposition provided by others which forever “haunt about [the urn’s] [. . .] shape” (5).

An argument could be made that the uninterrupted sequence of questions which end the first stanza show that the poet *is* greatly affected by the images on the urn, even if their exact relationship to the urn is uncertain. But while most critics believe that the readers’ own desire for answers, for satiation, is likely aroused by the poet’s questions, some also sense a coordinating, scheming intelligence at work in these lines. Andrew Bennett, for one, argues that “[i]n the micro-narrative of lines 5-10, Keats prefigures the narrative movement of the next two stanzas, and, to a certain extent, the larger narrative movement of the whole poem [which he defines as ‘an attempt to capture the virgin meaning of the urn’]” (137). Since the questions relate to an anticipated sexual conquest, they remind us of the urn’s own unravished status *and* of the poet’s previous prompting to anticipate a

ravishment of the urn. I modify Bennett's assessment of the poet and argue that the questions, then, rather than help demonstrate the images' power, serve instead as notice that the poet intends to capture, so as to enrapture, the virgin urn.

Further evidence that the images do not tease the poet out of narrative control is the confident manner in which he interacts with the images in the second stanza. Here he is not hoping for answers; instead, he is eager to and does dispense them. In the second, third, and fourth stanzas, in fact, the poet addresses images he portrays as sentient, as capable of hearing him, and as in desperate need of oratorical encouragement and soothing. He encourages "pipes" to "play on" (12). He uses logic to assist a "youth" (15), the "bold lover" (17), the "boughs" (21) and a "melodist" (22) to conceive of their immobility as a perpetual boon. What is inspiring his address to them, we note, is an aphorism—"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (11-12)—he wills to mind. By choosing to refer to words to inspire his involvement with the images, the poet thereby privileges them as containers of wisdom. The purported power of visual imagery is at the very least left undeveloped by this choice, and more than likely is undermined.

The poet's involvement with the images, though superficially tender, is self-serving, even rough. It is self-serving because their ignorance and neediness call attention to his own knowledge and capacities as a healer and lover. Because the images' immobility is the source of their plight, we take greater notice of the poet's energetic mind as he

felicitously distills and dispenses oratorical "medicine." It is rough because he first reminds each of the images of their plights—so to draw their attention to their dependence upon him—before administering to them. He therefore is a competent healer—well suited, we think, to tend to the vulnerable virgin urn's distress as much as those of the images'—and also a muscular lover—well endowed, we conclude, for a subsequent ravishing of the urn.

Bennett argues that the poet *literally* manhandles the urn as he engages with "its" images. He argues that the poet is "mak[ing] his own story" out of the images "by turning [the urn]" (142). He believes that the poet uses the image of the heifer in the fourth stanza to define his (the poet's) relationship to the urn. He argues:

[T]he heifer which is being led to the altar is a visual double of the urn itself: "What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape" becomes "And all her silken flanks with garlands drest." This coincidence in visual detail makes of the urn a sacrificial victim and the poet a "mysterious priest[.]" (142)

Though I conceive of his handling of these images as a turning point in the poem where the poet begins more to want to surrender his authority than assert it, I find his linking of poet to the priest to be apt. In the first three stanzas the poet is a "mysterious priest" (32): we sense in his handling of the images someone capable of great mercy but also of

ritualistic (he deals with each image swiftly and efficiently) brutality. I suspect, however, that in the middle stanzas, readers experience the poet as involving himself more with the urn's surface than with the urn proper. This is a distinction with a difference, for if we (at some level) experience his involvement with the images' distress as him handling the physical dressings imposed upon its surface, following the logic of the poem's developing plot, we suspect that a figurative ravishment of the urn's body awaits us in the fifth and closing stanza.

The fifth stanza does indeed begin with renewed attention to the urn's "shape" (41) and "form" (44), but we are meant to sense the urn's power, not its depletion. In fact the disintegration attended to in this stanza is the "wast[ing]" (46) away of his own body. Why, lead to anticipate an inevitable ravishment, does the urn end up "remain[ing] [unaffected], in midst of other woe" (47)? The poet, unlike the urn, has not simply been "teas[ing]" (44) us. Instead, the portrayal of the urn in the final stanza is informed by *his own* vulnerability, and therefore by his own need for an empowered "friend" (48). He was able to use the immobility of the images to show up the rewards offered those living in "quick" time (as opposed to those existing in "slow time" [2], or frozen time), without simultaneously complicating his self-enhancement with incurred self-doubt, because his activity created a momentary high. However, while denizens of frozen time cannot experience the pitfalls of a changing "terrain," the poet knows that historical time offers its

traversers egregious falls as well as mountainous highs. After his happy rush, he becomes "parch[ed]" (30) and "pious" (37). He now contemplates the terror of physical degeneration that his purposeful activity had for a time kept away.

His awareness of the boon of eternal existence, and the blight of a terminal one, as well as the highly self-reflexive dynamic he created with his involvement with the images, now lead him to reflect upon his own fate. We sense this narrative turn, this sudden emergence in the poem of signs of *his own* distress, when he engages the images in the fourth stanza. He does not seem as focused. Previously, the deftness and rapidity with which he dealt with the images communicated a confident, coordinated, teleological mind. Seemingly intent on plotting the urn's molestation, he didn't wander. In this stanza, however, he seems more someone who is searching in earnest than someone simply on a mission—there is genuine, open inquiry here, not the certain march toward an already ascertained goal. We witness him return to questioning. And this time, rather than help service his rhetorical mastery over the urn, his questions now reflect his vulnerability and genuine uncertainty.

His relationship to the images in the fourth stanza suggests his own desire for soothing answers. It suggests their (i.e., the images') power: the heifer and the priest seemingly lead to his conjuration of the abandoned town. Unlike the aphorism he willed forth earlier, this illusion shows his vulnerability as a man, not his capabilities as a poet. The

town's fate, we note, is one shared by those living in historical time. Much like the poet's corporeal fate, with those who once filled its streets departed, the town is bereft, "emptied" (37) of its life-blood. The town does not receive the consoling response the poet provided the images in the second and third stanzas with. It is, rather, left to stand, representative as it is of his own distress. Its unheard anguish airs his own call for assistance from an empowered, mysterious source, and indicates the awakening of his full awareness to this desire.

When the poet inscribes the word "silent" at the end of the fourth stanza, we should see it as awakening the poet "out of [his self-reflecting] thought[s]" (44). Aware of his own unmet needs, he turns to the "foster-child of silence" (2) with a new goal in mind. Whereas in the last stanza he originally intended to showcase the richness of oration and writing, of rhymes, and the comparative bareness of visual art, he finds himself in no mood to do so. Instead, he tries to establish for the urn the prowess he had earlier declared it possessed but had thereafter worked to deny. Whereas in the first stanza the poet established the urn's parent as "silence" and its groom as "quietness" (1), the fifth stanza finally emphasizes and comes close to establishing its own power as a "silent form" (44). Whereas before its feminine "shape" (5) suggested its vulnerability to masculine ravishment, its shape now links it to superhuman—or rather, *alien*—strength. As Geraldine Friedman notes, there is a "cycle of eros that runs between the impassioned close-ups of the individual panels, beginning in strophe one, to the renouncing of passion in strophe five,

where the urn becomes a distant 'Attic shape' [41] and 'Cold Pastoral' [45]" ("Erotics of Interpretation in Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'" 226). Given the urn's classical origins, by calling it a "form" (44) the poet likens the urn's shape to eternal, to abstract Pythagorean forms, and thereby helps neutralize the urn's sexy physicality. The urn's teasings in this stanza, we note, reminds him of "eternity" (45), not of sexual conquest.

The poet not only lends authority and mystery to the urn's shape—in the fifth stanza, the images on the urn's surface are commandingly owned by the urn itself. No longer images which haunt its shape, they constitute its "brede" (41). The urn repossesses the specific images the poet had earlier tainted with his own influence. The "[b]old lover" (17) he consoled, for instance, is now conflated within a multitude of unknown "marble men" (42): his influence upon him is humbled by the sudden algebraic multiplication of images. The urn's authoritative repossession, its "[c]old[ness]" (45) and "[f]air attitude" (40), are, however, the perfect salves to help temper his "burning" desire for an empowered, authoritative "friend" (48). They help reconstitute the urn so that its unheard, visual, sweet stories can better serve his newly prioritized need for an assured source of wisdom.

But if he means to inflate the prowess of the urn's shape and visual images, it certainly seems to work against his purpose to end the poem with lines written on its surface. Yet while these written words do contest the power of pictorial/sculptural art, they still enhance the urn's status. The

lines are an aphorism, and remind the poet that it was an aphorism which inspired his commanding encounters with the urn's images. In hopes of conclusively establishing the urn's potency, then, the poet shows the urn's images affecting him, offers it genuine praise, has it repossess its images, and, finally, has it make claim to the very source of his more confident involvement with it. Given the poet's previous sinister intentions, the urn's lines can fruitfully be imaged as molesting the legitimacy of the poet's earlier prideful encounter with the urn. And, in mimicking the poet's rapaciousness, the urn thereby becomes much more than a story-teller: by ridiculing the poet, and by self-reflexively establishing its own stature, the sweet urn returns to become an efficacious dispenser of sweet justice.

Works Cited

- Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." *Romanticism: An Anthology with CD-ROM*. 2nd Ed. Ed. Duncan Wu. Malden: Blackwell, 2000. Print.
- Bennett, Andrew. *Keats, Narrative and Audience*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- Friedman, Geraldine. "The Erotics of Interpretation in Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': Pursuing the Feminine." Print.

The Other Crowd (August 2003)

Outside, in the dark, the street is body-tall,

flowered with faces intent on the scarecrow thing
that shouts to thousands the echoing
of their own wishes.) The Orator has risen! (15-
18)

We might be inclined to interpret the dedication to Camillien Houde, in A.M. Klein's "Political Meeting," as a genuine gesture of Klein's respect for Houde's oratorical skills, but it may also be a gesture of sympathy for a man ensnared. For within the bracketed lines is content which calls into question the orator's belief that he "has them" (11), that he commands "the" "crowd" (9). While the orator has "[an]other voice" (33), within these lines is another crowd, a very different crowd, seemingly, from the one "[with]in the hall" (14). We meet a "street" crowd, not a kowed "country" (20) crowd. We find this crowd, not caught "in snares" (9), but "intent"

on the speaker, intending to use him as a “thing,” as a tool, to service its own desires.

If the bracketed material was not included in the poem there would be little in it that casts doubt on the orator’s dominion over his audience. The poem would relate how an orator, “kith and kin” (29) with his folksy crowd, moves his gullible, guidable audience to thoughts of race war. When he moves from “sling[ing] slang” and “wink[ing] folklore” (36) to “[c]almly” “speak[ing] of war” (38), the orator shows that from the beginning of his oration he had had a war-plan in mind. He is a plotting and masterful manipulator, and his audience is manageable, malleable stuff: we learn from the poem’s opening lines that “they [a]wait” (2) in “folding seats” “on [a] [. . .] school platform” (1), the “chairman’s” arrival and “praise” (2). However, Klein’s inclusion of the bracketed lines ensures some uncertainty exists as to who really was in control of whom at this political meeting.

The brackets help suggest that whatever the nature of the material they enclose, it does not quite fit with the rest of the text. (And, indeed, in this poem, it doesn’t.) We might normally construe bracketed material—optional reading, but for two reasons we might not do so here: one, we were told that the chairman’s charm depends on him being “full of asides and wit” (12); and two, we know that the poem is *about* transformations and elevations, including the “rise” of the “Orator!”

Our first reaction to learning of the “thousands” “[o]utside” is likely to assume that they are an extension of

the crowd found within the hall. We might assume that these thousands serve, by suddenly suggesting the expansive breadth of the orator’s appeal, to cinch the orator’s transformation from ordinary “chairman” to awesome “Orator” at the end of line 18. But the text works against our likely instinctive desire to conflate the two crowds together. Because one is “[o]utside,” the other inside, because one is “in the dark,” the other bathed in “yellow [. . .] light” (7), because one is associated with “streets,” and the other with “school platforms,” the two crowds—hardly “kith and kin”—cannot easily be merged. Any crowd found “[with]in the dark” would be menacing—a street crowd, particularly so. And though the “inside” crowd ravaged a “ritual bird” (9), they do little but slavishly “[w]orship and love” (19) their “country uncle” (20). This “street” crowd, on the other hand, at a distance from the orator—and harder to imagine as as intimately involved with his “shouts” as the crowd within the hall is with his “asides”—seems more malevolent than malleable, more studious than servile, and more a potential heavy counter-weight to his influence than an easily “pin[ned]” (26) lightweight “oppon[ent]” (26).

“[T]he street is body-tall”; it is a weight which might as easily overwhelm as enhance the orator/prophet’s “building” (13) oratorical mass. When we discover the semantic and rhythmic “echoing” of the “street” crowds’ “flowered faces” in the “country uncle’s” “sunflower seeds” (26), our sense that both harmony and dissonance exists in the relationship between the orator and this crowd is enhanced. We suspect

that it is what will be made of *this* crowd which matters, but we question what the orator can make of it. We cannot be certain whether the street's "flowered faces" are more likely to blossom or wilt in the presence of a repellent "scarecrow thing." Characterized as composed of "flowered faces," as opposed to say, crowded countenances, this crowd still attends to the scarecrow thing with some of the same studious "intent" that surely facilitated the orator's masterful manipulation of those within the hall. So while the orator has his "tricks" (21), the street crowd might be eyeing its puppet: how certain can we be that someone who services the desires of others, who "echo[es] / [. . .] [their] own wishes" is in any sense, or at any time, their master?

The "body-odour of race" (39) is what the orator summons at the end of the poem, not from those who "wait[ed]" in the hall but from those outside who comprise "[t]he whole street" (37). In retrospect, the repetition of "ou's" in the bracketed lines ("Outside," "shouts," "thousands") identify this temporary confine as the summoning circle of the poem's penultimate visitation: the invisible *odour*. No surprise, however, is the summoning of body odour—the inevitable by-product of body heat—from this corporeal street mass. No real "trick" (21), either. And so while there is no question left at the end of the poem as to whether the orator's rhetoric was inflammatory, we are left uncertain as to what transpired. Did the orator use the crowd? If so, which crowd? If the crowd inside the hall was directed towards thoughts of war, is it possible that the street

crowd, at least, used the "seed peddler" to bring to the surface their own deeply seeded racist thoughts?

Perhaps in "Political Meeting" Klein was bringing to the surface a "grim" (38) possible truth many of us still hesitate to consider. No doubt, even with the comparative ambiguity of the nature of the flowered/street crowd's relationship to the orator, the potency of the orator's power is conveyed in the poem. Almost certainly, the poem was born out of a modernist's desire for, and fears of, the arrival of central leaders who might unite a fractured society together. But perhaps contained in its "shadow[s]" (38) is the terrifying realization that the Houdes and Hitlers of the world arise from the wishes of legions of "willing executioners" (Goldhagen).

Works Cited

- Goldhagen, Daniel. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York: Knopf, 1996. Print.
- Klein, A. M. "Political Meeting." *15 Canadian Poets* × 3. Ed. Gary Geddes. Don Mills: Oxford UP, 2001. 41-42. Print.

*Adam's Presumptuous, Adventurous, Bold, and Righteous
(Re)Quest (December 2003)*

For the most part, presumptuous, adventurous, and bold behavior is associated with fallen characters in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Satan, for example, as he willfully journeys past every barrier in pursuit of his goal, is repeatedly described as bold. And, after she eats the apple, Eve too is described (by Adam) as "bold," "presumptuous," and "adventurous" (IX 921). There is however one character in the text who behaves this way yet is neither a fallen character nor shown to fall as a consequence of this behavior—that being, Adam, when he asks God for a companion. Though it is typical of Adam to circumscribe his freedom—as he does, for example, after Raphael warns him his interest in the heavens is becoming lustful—and though we are most familiar with the willful act which dooms him, Adam relentlessly pursues his claim to a companion and does not stop until he achieves his "heart's desire" (VIII 451). And though this encounter, especially as it advances, has all the feel of a trial that is testing Adam's

disobedience rather than his obedience, it likely surprises by actually proving one where Adam demonstrates his righteous use of his God-given freedom.

One of the things Raphael does which convinces Adam to desist in his inquiry into the make-up of the heavens, is to remind him of all he has already been given by God. Raphael advises Adam to take "joy [. . .] / In what he gives to thee, this Paradise / And fair Eve" (VIII, 170-73), and reminds him of how God had "bid dwell far off all anxious cares" (185). However, later in book VIII, when Adam tells Raphael how he received Eve from God, he relates to him how, despite having just been given Paradise to lord over, and having being told that Paradise is a place where he need not "fear [. . .] dearth" (322), he chose not to "check" (189) his "apprehension [that] [. . .] in these / [he] [. . .] found not what [he] thought [he] [. . .] wanted still" (355). Instead, Adam tells Raphael he pressed God for more. Asking for more after already having received so much is a presumptive thing to have done, and by characterizing his request as "presumptuous" (367), Adam shows he knows as much himself. Though he doesn't yet know that overreach is what doomed Satan, and what will doom Eve, he obviously has some sense that after already having received so much, to presume to ask God for more is at the very least inappropriate, and possibly, that it amounts to a significant trespass.

Though in his pursuit of "more" Adam may remind us of Satan's ingratitude, the way Adam responds to God's gifts

may have us thinking more of Jesus from *Paradise Regained* than of Satan from *Paradise Lost*. For just as Jesus responds to Satan's presentations in *Paradise Regained* of, for example, "a table richly spread" (II 340) and a "wide domain / In ample territory" (IV 81-82), by informing him that he has offered him nothing of value, Adam responds to God's declaration that "Not only these fair bounds, but all the earth / To thee and to they race I give" (VIII 338-39), by implying that God has failed to provide him with anything that will make him (Adam) happy or content (364-66). I draw this parallel to illustrate just how audaciously Adam begins his argument. Though Adam takes great care to avoid arousing God's anger when he speaks to him, his reply to God's gift-giving gesture nevertheless risks momentarily making God seem as impotent and foolish as Jesus' reply to Satan's lavish offerings made Satan seem.

God is not displeased with Adam, and my guess is that most readers are not surprised in this. For even if Adam is behaving outlandishly, God, after all, is (here still) a permissive deity, and Adam doesn't thus far seem to have disobeyed. However, when Adam chooses to persist beyond the obstacle which had previously inhibited his pursuit of further knowledge of the heavens, we likely become less sure as to how God will react.

When Raphael told Adam his interest in the heavens was not sinful, that "To ask or search I blame thee not" (VIII 66), he followed by none the less trying to dissuade Adam in his concern to know more about them. He told Adam to

"admire" (75) God's creations, to be content with what he has, and to "Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid" (167). Similarly, though God smiles at Adam to let him know he has not (yet) transgressed, he follows by reminding Adam that his "realm is large," and orders him to "Find pastime, and bear rule" (375). And when, despite recognizing God's reply as an "order" (VIII 377), Adam chooses to proceed, we likely feel that he is (tres)passing into very uncertain territory. Adam understands that by proceeding he may be transgressing beyond a barrier intended to hem him in—this being, of course, God's command that he desist and find happiness in all that had already been provided. And in fact, much like Satan before entering the abyss, Adam prepares himself as if embarking on a perilous journey. He implores God not to "Let [his] [. . .] words offend [him]" (379), and thereby is likely trying "to ward of the potential punishment by anticipating it" (Forsyth 119). But Adam does not advance meekly; instead, we sense his boldness, his aggressiveness, even his arrogance in his subsequent response to God.

Adam becomes judgmental and assertive. We sense his willfulness, for example, when he states that mismatched pairs "soon prove / Tedious alike: of fellowship *I speak* / Such *as I seek*" (VIII, 389-90; emphasis added). An encounter which began with God's assertiveness, His egoism, clearly evident in the text (the result, in part, of the accumulating declarative statements God makes: "I have set" [324], "I warn thee" [327], "I give" [339], "I bring" [343]), is becoming one where Adam is the more active and assertive of the pair. And

though we are again told that God was “not displeased” (398) with Adam, we may not be much assuaged by God’s reaction, for God responds to Adam’s assertiveness as if baiting him into making the same mistake that doomed Satan. That is, as if sensing that this encounter is becoming a battle of wills, God, in effect, sets Adam up—by making it so he must argue himself not just god-like but God’s *superior* in order to “win” their debate!

God tells Adam that he “see[s]” “A nice and subtle happiness” (VIII 399) in Adam’s state, and invites Adam to imagine how he (God), purportedly as isolated as Adam, feels. In order to prove to God that he truly is unhappy, then, Adam must both demonstrate he sees better than God does and that he has insight into the state of, if not God’s mind, then at least His heart. Now rather than call God shortsighted, Adam takes care to stress how “All human thoughts come short” (414) to that of God, and Adam is otherwise very self-deprecating in this passage. However, Adam nevertheless indirectly suggests that God’s sight has not provided with him with *insight* into the state of Adam’s mind/heart, and he does speculate as to the nature of God’s “need[s]” (419). And, after Adam finishes having “emboldened sp[oke]” (434), after having dared “to have equalled [or surpassed the reasoning/debating skills of] the most High” (I 40), he is handsomely rewarded with his “heart’s desire” (VIII 451).

God rewards Adam for the “permissive” (VIII 435) use of his reason and freedom, but given how presumptuous he

was just to initiate his request, how bold he was to disobey God’s apparent order and persist, and how adventurous he was to advance an argument which at times risked making God seem foolish and himself God-like, we might still feel that God rewards Adam here for the same sort of indulgent, disobedient behavior that doomed Satan and Eve. The likelihood we sense he got away with one is considerable, since emboldened characters normally are the ones punished in *Paradise Lost*, and since Adam normally circumscribes his freedom, as he does, for instance, when he learns his interest in the heavens is becoming lustful.

For me, at least, the non-typical nature of this encounter draws my interest in the same way that nature’s “disproportions” drew Adam’s (VIII 7): it also excites me to be presumptuous. Though my purpose here has been largely to focus on the oddity of Adam being rewarded for the sort of presumptuous, adventurous, and bold behavior which normally dooms characters in *Paradise Lost*, I cannot help but finish by speculating as to why this aberration exists. Though Adam is the only *character* in the text rewarded for behaving this way, there is another around who does the same but has not yet received judgment for doing so—that being, the narrator, or, if you will, Milton himself. My conjecture, then: perhaps if it was easier for the narrator/Milton to initiate his own admittedly “adventurous” (I 13), ambitious, and “presum[ptuous]” (VII 13) epic “song” (I 13) when he knew he would tell/sing of at least one man who “aim[ed]” “ambitious[ly]” (I 41), yet avoided being “Hurled headlong

flaming from the ethereal sky” (45) for doing so.

Works Cited

Forsyth, Neil. *The Satanic Epic*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost. John Milton: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Jonathan Goldberg and Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991. 355-618. Print.

Not Meat (March 2004)

The thin muslin went flaring up the chimney like a magic bird and now off came her skirt, her woollen stockings, her shoes, and on to the fire they went, too, and were gone for good. The firelight shone through the edges of her skin; now she was clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh. This dazzling, naked she combed out her hair with her fingers; her hair looked white as the snow outside. Then went directly to the man with red eyes i whose unkempt mane the lice moved; she stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt.

What big arms you have.

All the better to hug you with.

Every wolf in the world howled a prothalamion outside the window as she freely gave the kiss she owed him.

What big teeth you have!

She saw how his jaw began to slaver and the room was full of the clamour of the forest's Liebestod

but the wise child never flinched, even when he answered:

All the better to eat you with.

The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. The flames danced like dead souls on Walpurgisnacht and the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering but she did not pay them any heed.

Carnivore incarnate, only immaculate flesh appeases him. (Angela Carter, "The Company of Wolves" 118)

In this passage a little girl becomes a woman, a wife, and a savior. When she calmly "combe[s] out her hair," when she moves "directly to the man" before her, she for the first time acts with womanly composure and deliberation. But she was always capable of developing. Unlike other children, fear of the "teeming perils of the night and forest" (111) had not shriveled her capacity and desire for play and exploration. Indeed, unlike Little Red Riding Hood (and Little Red Cap), *she* was the one who made the decision to venture out into the woods. Yet though she had dreamed of having more, of being more, than the "rustic clowns" (114) of her native village, when she first sensed that the desirous courtly gentleman she encountered in the woods meant her harm, her first reaction was indistinguishable from that of other

folk, from that of prey. When she "pulled [her] scarlet shawl more closely round herself" (117) and temporarily allowed the wolf control over her fate, she was like the passive, pathetic young bride who "drew the coverlet up to her chin and waited and [. . .] waited and [. . .] waited" (112). She was acting just like how Little Red Riding Hood, the dressed-up puppet of mothers and wolves, would. But she shows in this passage that she is not so foolish as to believe—as many "old wives" (113) did—that decorum might tame wolves as much as it might little girls. Rather than "throw a hat [. . .] at [him]" (113), she disrobes him, and her "flesh" baits—and beats—the wolf.

Though she begins the seduction by "st[anding] up on tiptoe and unbutton[ing] [his] collar" (118), this woman need not be dainty. Like the wolf who can move with facility from "delicate" (115) gestures to forceful advances, she soon "rip[s] off his shirt [. . .] and fl[ings] it into the fire." The wolf, too, we remember, "strip[ped] off his" clothing and "flung off" (116) a blanket, and the matching of terms used to describe their actions helps make their physical and marital union seem appropriate. It is true that when she "laughed at him full in the face," her action, in part, read as payback and revenge for the time he held clear advantage over her. While before the absurd innocence of a little girl who gazed upon the "little" compass he kept in his pocket "with a vague wonder" (114), drew him to laugh, now his inability to register that his fastidiously laid out plans have gone awry, that she may in fact be toying *with him* when she exclaims,

“What big teeth you have!,” draws her to laugh back at him in return. But they are both too much the same (and too different from others) for this response to establish something other than their equivalence. Both draw their considerable energy from potent inner resources; both are integrally linked to the plot’s key dynamic—that of invasion and repulsion/redemption—and her laugh is linked to a greater purpose: he, with “eyes full” “with a unique, interior light” (117), is one of a company of wolves who haunt a whole world with their howling pain, and she, with a “dazzling” “integument of flesh” will, with a laugh, alleviate it.

The wolves are the story’s perpetual intruders, but the narrator ensures that no one, no thing, escapes infestation. The villagers are visited by “infernal vermin” (116). The reader is brought “[in]to [a] [. . .] region” (110), “in[to] the forest” (112), introduced to the terrifying wolves and their “rending” (110) howl, then deposited at a “hearthside” (111) and told that though “[w]e try and try [. . .] [,] [we] [. . .] cannot keep [the wolves] [. . .] out” (111). Even the wolves suffer “so” (117). In a text where adjectives often infest, intensify, overwhelm, and corrupt their unfortunate “host” nouns (e.g., “acid milk” [111], “malign door” [113], “rustic clowns” [114], and in this passage, “old bones”), the wolves, though “they would love to be less beastly” (112), are burdened by their own “inherent” beastliness. But various and indiscriminate oppression enables liberation to become more sweet, significant, and shared when it arrives. The

narrator is heightening the expectation for an epochal event, an act of resistance so powerful and reverberating that it might “open” the “door” (118) to a whole new era.

The young woman, described as “a sealed vessel,” as someone possessing a “magic space shut tight with a plug” (114), is ideally constituted to repel invasions. She is the perfect person to serve as the “external mediator” (112) the “carnivore[s] incarnates” are waiting for. And in this passage, where the gathering wolves invade the room with their “clamour,” where the dialogue follows the familiar pattern of folklore which leads to a wolf’s ingestion of a little girl, the young woman does not “flinch” (118). Since “flinch” is one of the innumerable words in this story (and in this passage) (e.g., “thin,” “skin,” “infinite,” “inherent,” etc.) which contains within themselves the preposition “in,” her imperviousness here is set up to seem especially significant. But it is her riposte, the expulsion of her own sardonic laugh “out loud,” not her parry, which counters and disrupts the story’s predatory inward movements and inaugurates a series of paragraphs in which she “wills” (118) the action and determines the fate of a land.

In this passage all the “wolv[es] in the world” come “carol[ling]” (117) on Christmas Eve, but they do not “sing to Jesus” (111). Instead, these feral witnesses serenade the mental maturation of a young woman well suited to keep a “fearful” wolf company and to “still” and “silence” (118) the “endless” (112) suffering afflicting a “savage country” (113).

Work Cited

Carter, Angela. "The Company of Wolves." *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Markham: Penguin, 1981. Print.

Securing Their Worth (March 2004)

Though their small stature and inexperience is what may first come to mind when we think of children's vulnerable nature, children are both physically *and* emotionally vulnerable. They are not only unsure of how they might handle threats upon their lives, but of the value of the life that might be taken from them. Indeed, their need to feel special inspires its own fear—namely, that it might make them vulnerable to predators. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* well capture how much children hope to be thought worthy by discerning adults. Their child protagonists, Jim Hawkins and Wilbur, are initially unsure of their worth, and therefore also unsure of how much they deserve the high praise they first receive. They both, however, do find ways to assure themselves that they matter to those whose respect they so highly prize.

Jim begins his account by showing himself as just an ordinary boy. It is Billy Bones, the fearsome pirate who visits his parent's inn, that he describes as impossible to ignore.

Bones, then, Jim's first textual representation of someone with presence, is the perfect person for young Jim to use as a touchstone to gauge his own importance. Most people were frightened by Bones (4), and though Jim tells us that he "was far less afraid of the captain himself than anybody else who knew him" (3), and though he tells us that the captain took a special interest in him, Jim portrays Bones as attending to and praising him only to make use of him. When he takes Jim "aside" (3), when he tells Jim that he "had taken quite a fancy to [him]" (8), both the reader and Jim sense that Bones thinks of him as but a potentially useful tool—never, however, a *self-evidently* useful one. Jim is portrayed as having made little impression upon Bones; it is Bones, rather, especially when he tries to bribe Jim and thereby shows he really thinks him more common than special, who powerfully affects Jim.

Before Jim's truly remarkable escapades on Treasure Island, whenever he receives praise, the praise ends up proving worse than worthless. For example, the squire, who has just met Jim, gauges "this lad Hawkins is a trump" (31), and proceeds to deplete this high assessment of all value when he subsequently also calls the "cook," John Silver, "a perfect trump" (46). Silver lets Jim know right away he thinks him "smart as paint," and then suggests just how dull and easily lead he really thinks he is by subsequently trying to persuade him that "none of the pair us smart" (45). (Jim, when he overhears Silver call another boy "as smart as paint" [58], is later provided with further evidence that Silver had actually judged him of little merit.) But before landing on

Treasure Island, Jim actually does little to merit being singled out as special, so it is appropriate that the praise he receives proves the kind readily dispensed by flatterers. For, though he retrieves a valuable map which launches a great adventure, though he spots Black Dog at the Spy Glass and puts all Long John Silver's plans at risk, there is little sense that these actions could not have been accomplished by pretty much anyone.

Jim's account ends up making the argument that if one wants to be certain that the praise or attention one receives is honest, it is really better to receive it only after accomplishing something others likely would not have managed, and after having first been underestimated. We know, for instance, that the only person whose status increased after his encounter with Bones was Doctor Livesey, who remained "calm and steady" (6) after the captain threatened him with a knife. Bones clearly had underestimated the "neat, bright doctor" (5), and as a result still has him on his mind months afterwards (7). And once Jim ends up accomplishing things that truly defy expectation, he too is provided with clear indication that significant personages had reappraised his worth.

After Jim leaves his friends and joins the pirates as they embark for the island, Livesey, who temporarily takes control of the narrative, talks of how he "wonder[ed] over poor Jim Hawkins's fate" (96). As far as the Livesey was concerned, Jim was so much the vulnerable and frail boy he thought him sure to succumb to the various threats the island or—more

especially—the pirates would incur upon him. But by ending his narration with Jim’s sudden, dramatic appearance at their camp, he documents how much he had underestimated Jim’s survival skills; just how surprised he was to see him return unscathed. When he once again unexpectedly finds Jim before him, the doctor, who previously had a habit of casually interrupting him (29), shows how much he now respects him by listening to what he had to say in full and “in silence” (168) before responding. Livesey then tells Jim he judges him someone who at “[e]very step, [. . .] saves our lives” (168), and thereby provides him with a very flattering but still just-plain-accurate assessment of his value to their party. Jim ends up surprising Silver with an unexpected “visit” as well, and he informs the person who had once so readily sized him up as simply an impressionable and needy young boy that he had killed some of his men and taken control of the schooner. And though Jim writes that he wasn’t quite sure whether or not the “curious” “accent” Silver adopts in reply showed he “had been favourably affected by [his] courage” (152), Silver, by subsequently putting all his cunning into saving Jim’s life, ends up showing that he too now considers him the sort of person who might very well end up saving his own life one day.

Because by the end of his account he has had a chance to show he thrives in dangerous situations, can do the unexpected and effect miraculous results, Jim likens himself to someone beside whom Billy Bones pales in comparison—Long John Silver himself. Jim even structures his narrative to

encourage a temporary conflation between the two of them. He does this by following the termination of the doctor’s control over the narrative with a chapter that ends with *Silver* now making a sudden and unexpected appearance at their camp. And Silver, the man who could so easily become a “bland, polite, obsequious seaman” (186) when it suits his purpose but whose true worth is never in doubt, is the perfect person for someone like Jim to try and make himself seem—even if only momentarily—comparable to. For, remembering how insignificant and invisible he seemed in comparison to Bones, Jim could never convince himself he is the “born favourite” (185) his miraculous accomplishments end up persuading others (specifically, Captain Smollett) he must be. He would, however, be able to convince himself that his adventure to Treasure Island has left him someone only the ignorant would mistake for but an ordinary boy.

In *Charlotte’s Web*, Wilbur tries to imitate Charlotte’s ability to spin webs. Like Jim, he wants to do things he knows would prove he’s of worth. Jim was to be a simple “cabin-boy” (34) on the journey, someone who would tag along, whom others would need to protect. Similarly, Wilbur was assigned no role in the planning and execution of Charlotte’s efforts to save him. But whereas Jim repeatedly achieves the near impossible, and is therefore deemed someone not only competent to take care of himself but someone who would be counted on to save others, Wilbur of course fails in his repeated attempts to spin a web, decides that Charlotte is just so “much cleverer [and] brighter” (60) than he is, and tries to

content himself by admiring *her own* expertise.

His failure to spin a web is so deflating for Wilbur because, like Jim, he has little sense that he is worth all that much. Wilbur is a runt, the very *opposite* of a born favorite, and his status as the weakest of his litter, the one a farmer would rightly deem most likely to live a sickly life and incur an early death, makes Fern's father think of him as simply something "to [be quickly done] away with" (1). Not even Fern's frantic efforts to save Wilbur, nor her enthusiastic appraisal of him as "absolutely perfect" (4), provide clear evidence of his worth. For unlike Silver's risky efforts to save Jim, which seemed appropriate not just because he might prove useful but because he is someone whose true nature, once revealed, draws instant respect from those who also had started early and thereafter had only known dangerous living, Fern tries to save Wilbur before he has actually done anything to warrant such an enthusiastic response from her. And though Fern likely values him for other reasons, it is clear that she judges Wilbur absolutely perfect primarily because she sees in him the ideal means to calm down fears she is currently suffering from. For her, that is, saving the new-born runt tends to her doubts that someone might not always be there to help her when feeling especially vulnerable.

Since being vulnerable, dependent, can be withering to one's sense of self, taking charge of Wilbur might also have helped Fern develop a stronger sense of her own worth. She says she "feel[s] lucky" (7) to have him, and she is lucky to have him, for looking over Wilbur lets her conceive of herself

more as a benefactor than a dependent. Wilbur becomes her baby, someone she takes pleasure in "tak[ing] charge" (7) of. She nurtures him, she names him, and Wilbur greets her attention with his own "adoring eyes" (8)—with sure confirmation of her importance to him, that is. But as Fern grows older and becomes more desirous of attention from boys than from babies, it is no surprise that though she saved Wilbur's life, she did not do much to make him sure enough of himself that he wouldn't doubt the motives behind subsequent eager efforts by others to befriend him.

When Charlotte takes over Fern's role as his guardian and protector, Wilbur conveys to her just how unsure he is of himself. He insists to Charlotte that he is "not terrific," that he is really "just about average" (91), and he might thereby be trying to establish a clearer sense as to why Charlotte has taken such a keen interest in him. But Charlotte, seemingly oblivious or indifferent to how poorly others' validation has hereto succeeded in making him feel special, tells him he should be content to know she finds him "terrific" and "sensational" (91). But actually Wilbur has very good reasons not to content himself with her praise. For one, the use of the word "sensational" suggests over-praise, that is—*false* praise: it is *exactly* the sort of word Charlotte might put in her web to suggest to others that they must surely be seeing what they clearly wouldn't have seen, absent her miraculous advertising. For another, Charlotte, by choosing to plot Wilbur's rescue all by herself, not only ensures Wilbur relates to her in the same dependent, worshipful way he related to Fern, but that

all credit for saving his life belongs to her alone.

It is not impossible that Wilbur suspects Charlotte is using him to make herself feel special. She certainly provides evidence that in reality she actually swoons far more over spectacular accomplishments than she does humble good tries. She tells him a true tale of her cousin successfully capturing a “wildly thrashing” (102) fish. It is a epic, “never-to-be-forgotten battle” that will immortalize its hero—and so too then, surely, her own efforts to use webbing to ensnare not just a fish but beguiled whole crowds of astonished people.

The fully domesticated Wilbur, however, whose own high public regard shows only Charlotte’s cleverness and the public’s “gullib[ility]” (67), probably would have a hard time imagining himself akin to either of the noble combatants Charlotte describes in the tale. But he actually *had* once thrashed about as wildly and as spectacularly as the fish had, and he *will* end up capturing something as significant as the tale’s spider managed to obtain. Before he met Charlotte, before he accommodated himself to farm life, slippery Wilbur evaded farmer and farmhand alike, and, indeed, never was caught by any of them. And this activity resulted in his earning indisputably well-earned praise—of the sort, that is, which would lead him to truly believing he must in fact be “quite [the] [. . .] pig” (23). And whether or not Wilbur might have intuited the conditions necessary for him to once again be truly praiseworthy, Wilbur finally ends up capturing something of great value only when he once again finds

himself away from the barn, and without Charlotte there to assist him. At the fair, and with Charlotte near death, his quick-thinking and assertiveness results in the retrieval of Charlotte’s “*magnum opus*” (144; emphasis in original), her greatest creation—her egg sack. And the feint wink Charlotte gives him in reply no doubt outdoes all her previous web-spinning efforts in making him feel special.

Both Jim Hawkins and Wilbur are uncertain of their worth, and both end up seeming worthy of recognition only after they are able to accomplish something of evident worth, that others, for lack of enterprise, could not have managed. This means performing bravely and with perspicacity, outside of environments they had become accustomed to and had been domesticated in. In both books, then, the potentially dangerous and unpredictable outside world is not simply a place children should fear, it is also a treasure trove in which they could discover true value, a strange fair in which they might fairly claim the respect they so highly prize.

Works Cited

- Stevenson, R.L. *Treasure Island*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.
- White, E.B. *Charlotte’s Web*. New York: Harpers Collins, 2003. Print.

Socrates and his God (May 2004)

Given what we hear from him in *The Apology*, it is not clear why Socrates “follows” his God, Apollo. There is evidence to support three explanations: 1) because he is compelled to; 2) because he wants to enable goodness; and 3) out of self-interest.

At least in *The Apology*, Socrates never says he “follows” God. Instead, he characterizes himself as God’s gift to the Athenians. He says, “I am really one given to you by God” (437), and as such he is not so much someone who follows Him as he is an extension or a key possession of His. He argues that it is because he is a gift of God’s that he possesses a capacity to neglect “all [his] [. . .] own interests” (437), and why an affront to him amounts to an offence against his god. It is a self-conception that makes him seem most like a puppet, most like someone who follows God because He is, so to speak, pulling his strings, and explains why he argues that he “*cannot*” “disobey the god” (443; emphasis added).

But there is also evidence in “the Apology” to support

understanding him as not compelled to follow God but as *drawn* to follow Him. When Socrates says that through “oracles and dreams” (439) his “God commands” him “to wake [. . .] up” (436) his fellow Athenians, when he says that he was “posted” by God with a specific “duty to be a philosopher” (434-35), we sense he feels strongly obligated but not compelled to follow his god’s plans for him. The prophetic voice he hears “checks” him, it “opposes” (445) him. It is or has an “influence” (439) he strongly registers and which impedes his actions, but is not unequivocally presented as something which *cannot* be resisted. That is, we are left room to believe the primary reason he heeds its directions is because he “trust[s]” (441) its source, Apollo. He trusts Apollo because he believes Him “wise” (429) and good. Alone, though like everyone he would want to be good, he would never be sure what goodness was. But following the directions of his god makes him sure “there is no greater good for [his fellow Athenians] [. . .] in the city in any way than [his] [. . .] service to God” (436).

But his defence also provides evidence for understanding Socrates as following his god because servility has its (considerable) benefits. Socrates argues that following His commands has meant an arduous life, but also a life of hearing from a “familiar prophetic voice [. . .] even in very small things” (445). Unlike Oedipus, who felt abandoned by the gods, Socrates keeps constant company with his god—a god, who, yes, commands him to live a life which leaves him materially poor, but one who also leaves him feeling certain

he is important both to Him and to most important Athenians. Socrates suggests he has little or rather no interest in “title[s]” (429) or honor, but if we doubt his sincerity, he would have had to have done more than just point to his *material* poverty to prove he does not follow his god for riches.

Socrates may not be proud or self-interested, but we know that even if he was he would be very unlikely to admit this to himself, for he has much riding on his being thought good by his god. Socrates playfully imagines spending his time joyfully conversing with heroes such as Odysseus in his afterlife. He says that only God knows what awaits him after death; but the reason he might be thinking of an ideal ultimate fate for himself is because he feels sure “no evil can happen to a good man either living or dead, and his business is not neglected by the gods” (446).

We have evidence, then, to support several hypotheses as to why Socrates “follows” his god. Socrates would disavow the latter, and possibly the latter two, but all three explanations *are* backed by evidence. We might at least agree that Socrates follows God because he believes gods exist whom one might follow—but his accusers are given reason in *The Apology* to consider otherwise. Socrates constantly refers to his god in his defence, but one of the reasons he is on trial is because he is accused of being a dangerous atheist. In this position, a self-preserving atheist as much as a reverent follower of God, would be sure to intersperse his defence with references to Him.

Work Cited

Aristotle. *The Philosophy of Aristotle*. Comp. Renford Bambrough. Eds. J.L.Creed and A.E. Wardman. New York: Signet, 2003.

Lie about everything under the sun (May 2004)

Poets are supposed to shine light on the actions of heroes and gods, but since they work with “shadows” (i.e., images), they are ill-prepared to do so. Because they “work far away from truth in doing [their] [. . .] work” (403), poets spread lies, not light, and they lie about everything under the sun. About justice and men, they tell us “that many men are happy though unjust” (189), an assertion Plato spends most of *The Republic* trying to disprove. About gods and heroes, they tell us these fundamentally good beings “beget evils,” a lie that ensures that “everyone will find an excuse for [themselves] [. . .] to be evil” (189).

But poets would work little evil if most people recognized their mistruths and deemed them ugly and repugnant. However, Plato argues that most people are unaware that poets “neither know nor have right opinion about what [they] [. . .] imitate” (402), and that they therefore find poets’ fables beautiful and appealing. No one more so than the young, for they have had little time to become acquainted with Beauty, and the “inferior part of the[ir]

DRAINING THE AMAZON’S SWAMP

soul[s],” the part which “hungers to be satisfied with tears and a good hearty cry” and which poetry “feeds” (405), is not yet under the control of the reasoning part. And once they have “receive[d] the honeyed Muse,” they can “be sure that pleasure and pain will be kings in their” (407) souls, for poetry works like a virus in that it “destroy[s] the [soul’s] rational part” (405).

The plenitude of “unenlightened” and undisciplined people explains why Plato is as concerned as he is about poetry’s ability to corrupt, but he believes poetry can actually be used to help people “see” Justice. But in order to do so it must be stripped of much of what makes it poetical—of its “honey.” Poetry must be purged of its rhetorical excess, which excites a soul that should be made temperate. It must also be limited to showing us good people and good deeds, for we alter our natures in correspondence with what we imitate. And the only people who can be trusted with censorship that determines whether poetry undermines or facilitates justice are those who truly have “seen the light”: the philosophers.

Work Cited

Plato. *Great Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. W.H.D. Rowe. New York: Signet, 1999.

‘Mi Casa, Su Casa’ (August 2004)

A suburban, collegiate young man (hereafter SCM) has a very good reason to find pulp fiction attractive. Having spent the majority of his life under his parents’ rule, it must be a pleasure for him to engross himself within an imaginary world where people much different from his parents reign. But however much he might admire his heroes, he must wonder from time to time what these natural denizens of the urban jungle, these professional killers, would think of him if they were somehow to meet. I will be looking at *Pulp Fiction* as if it were an SCM’s daydream, a daydream in which such an encounter is staged as part of an attempt to conceive of a “space” wherein both he and his pulp-fiction heroes might respectfully, amiably—and most importantly—*plausibly* be imagined co-existing with one another.

When we first encounter Vincent and Jules they are conversing in a way that is easy to imagine as being both familiar and appealing to an SCM. SCMs can readily identify with Vincent as he recounts his first European experience to

Jules. They can easily be imagined as being fascinated by Amsterdam drug-culture, as enjoying hearing how the Quarter Pounder’s name was altered so that it would be better received in France. But though SCMs are likely to find much of the conversation recognizable—it isn’t much different from what you’d hear in a college dorm—clearly these two men are not to be found in a dorm near you. They are the urban jungle’s warriors, its professional killers, and it is appropriate that we hear the song “Jungle Fever” just before we meet them and that it continues to play in the background as we listen in on their conversation. They are the sort of formidable, undomesticated men SCMs would like, at least in some respects, to resemble. They the sort of men SCMs would especially love to call friends.

We soon find out that a group of associates of Vincent and Jules’ boss, Marsellus Wallace, have betrayed him, and that they have been dispatched to deal with them. When the two enter the traitorous group’s apartment we encounter the first insertion of the SCM into the film. Because both Vincent and Jules agree they should have been equipped with shotguns for the assignment, his appearance surprises us: we certainly were not expecting to discover that the associates of Marsellus’s are, as Jules correctly IDs them, kids: Vincent and Jules come across as simply too competent to warrant being concerned by college boys. Though neither show any sign they were expecting to encounter anyone different, Jules indirectly has us attending to how poorly they pass as associates. He repeatedly asks Brett what country he is from,

a question Brett has trouble answering. He also notices that these kids, by dining on hamburgers, are not eating what they should be eating for breakfast. Since Vincent and Jules were just discussing burgers, very likely the reason they are shown eating them is because it links them to their heroes. That is, the intruding burgers are really *mostly* the SCM's interjected hope that his own familiarity with junk-food pop culture is sufficient to make his largely unadulterated real-life identity congruent with that of his pulp-fiction heroes'.

But even though *Pulp Fiction* is the SCM's daydream, the insecure, inexperienced SCM simply cannot convince himself he would matter to Vincent and Jules, who up to this point are shown as seasoned professionals. The SCM has trespassed into a situation he does not belong in, in a world he fabricated but clearly doesn't (yet) belong to. It is equally implausible that he would be an associate of gangster bosses as it is that he would be in the possession of a briefcase packed with beaming golden riches. Though the kids have gotten hold of something they shouldn't have, the SCM's inability to credit this scenario as plausible ensures they don't get away with it. Jules pretends to execute biblical justice; but as he efficaciously disposes of the kids, what he most truly executes is *poetic* justice. And after being punished for his trespass, the SCM pulp-fiction reader makes sure to retract and then to reconstitute his daydream so that it now reflects pulp-fiction normalcy: with the insertion of Butch, the aging but renown boxer, the next scene manifests someone a gangster boss in a pulp-fiction story would be near-expected

to be seen doing business with.

The SCM's first reaction to the humiliation is to stage a retreat, but the experience has him crave revenge. He therefore is eventually drawn to restage the encounter in such a way that *Vincent and Jules* become the ones punished for entering a world that *they* clearly don't belong to. After Vincent accidentally shoots the young black man Marvin, Jules calls his friend, Jimmy, in hopes of finding sanctuary. Jimmy is a young man who lives in a well-kept suburban home, and who, despite being called a "partner" of Jules's, certainly gives every appearance of being someone who works at a day job (as he says, "storin dead niggers ain't [his] [. . .] business"). Jimmie's world is one populated by soccer moms, not gangster mobs. And just as Jules was the one who called attention to the SCM's incongruent appearance in the pulp-fiction universe, with his declaring, "This is the Valley, Vincent—Marsellus don't got no friendly places in the Valley," he acknowledges his own trespass into the suburban world.

Before their encounter with Jimmie, Jules is shown trying to persuade Vincent how important it is that they use tact when dealing with him. The fact that these professional bullies feel they will need to rely on diplomacy rather than guns to handle the upcoming situation, forewarns us that they are less likely to succeed here than they were before with Brett. Jules fears he might be the one who suffers most in the upcoming encounter with Jimmie—and rightly so, for since he was the one in particular who brutally shamed the SCM,

he will be the one upon whom in particular the SCM executes revenge.

After washing their hands and doing their best to appear respectable (a miserable failure: they stand before Jimmie as if two kids who have gone and spoiled their Sunday clothes), they are presumably ready to talk to Jimmie. Jules tries to soothe Jimmie's anger, to handle him. Just like Brett had once tried to pacify Jules by politely asking his name, Jules compliments his coffee. But in neither situation does either one of them—as Jules would say—“talk their way out of this shit.” Brett was punished for an inexcusable trespass; Jules will experience the same—for *the same*—here. In this facsimile of the suburban parental home, Jimmie, not Jules, rules (later he will actually end up responding to Jules's complaints by saying, “My house, my rules”): the SCM understands from his childhood experience of suburbia that therein those connected to a respectable, “decent” way of life are those who are righteous and right (so no bible-quoting here from Jules).

In this SCM daydream it is therefore appropriate in this situation that Jimmie denies Jules control. He curtly tells Jules to “not Jimmie” him, and won't let Jules interrupt him (he snarls, “I'm talkin,” when Jules tries to do so). He then asserts that Jules' intrusion could well cost him his marriage. Just as Jules's shooting of Brett's friend served to terminate Brett's argument and initiated Jules's fiery retort, here Jimmie's accusation stops short Jules's attempts to handle him, and initiates his own verbal harangue. While before Jules bullied

Brett by repeatedly asking him, “what does Marsellus look like? Does he look like a bitch?” Jimmie now bullies Jules by repeatedly asking him if he “notice[d] a sign out front that said, ‘dead nigger storage?’” Just as Jules had forced Brett into muttering monosyllabic answers to his questions, Jules is now limited to the same. And though neither Vincent nor Jules end up being shot, clearly a facsimile of Brett's execution is replayed in this scene, with this time Jules and Vincent ending up the victims. Though Wolf—a gangster concocted so to plausibly be conceived of existing in both domestic and pulp-fiction worlds—is actually the one who sprays Jules and Vincent with the water nozzle/gun, Jimmie stands at his side, helps direct his spray, and takes evident delight in their discomfort.

Jimmie is no college student, but he is an SCM as he might imagine himself becoming not too long after college. Since his privileging in this scene depends upon his adoption of and respect for domestic, parental mores—that is, the same mores whose influence SCMs are trying to escape from when they read pulp fiction—he is not however someone the SCM really hopes to end up like: becoming like Jimmie would amount to their never having managed to leave their parents' moral universe. The SCM neither wants to be Brett, nor Jimmie. He neither wants to conceive of himself as someone who would readily be bullied by or as someone who might be empowered to bully his pulp-fiction heroes—he wants these heroes as friends! But clearly, convincing himself he could be the sort of person his pulp-fiction hero would like to hang

out with will require some imaginative work on his part. He will have to imagine and create a character whose identity is significantly different from his own but who still remains recognizably an SCM. That is, as was required for the American “Quarter Pounder” to be accepted within French culture, to be credible in the pulp-fiction universe, he must make significant amendments to his image.

He makes some—and comes up with Lance, the suburban drug dealer. Though in some respects Lance is very much like Jimmie—they both appear to be about the same age, are married, and live in suburban neighborhoods—drugs and thugs go together much better than did dead niggers and uptight suburbanites. That is, Lance’s profession permits him to share the same space as Vincent without either of them seeming out of place. He is a sort of criminal the typical SCM probably believes exists in suburbia, the sort of criminal who might well have school as well as street smarts. Though more recognizable as a real person than Wolf is, he too is proficient in dealing with both suburban and street denizens. The SCM stages an encounter between Lance and Vincent, rather than between Lance and Jules, because Vincent is portrayed as the less threatening, more vulnerable of the two. Unlike Jules (but like SCMs), Vincent can be careless, even inept. After Jules’s masterful handling of the kids, for example, Vincent shows well-earned presumption semblancing back into clumsy amateurism, with his accidental shooting of Marvin. In sum, Vincent is selected because he is the pulp-fiction hero who most closely resembles the SCM.

They encounter each other amiably, as friends, in Lance’s suburban home. There is an attempt on Vincent’s part to maneuver Lance into lowering his prices, and while Lance’s response, “you’re in my home,” resembles Jimmie’s response to one of Jules’s complaints, no one is made to feel subordinate in this scene. For the first time in the daydream we find an encounter between an SCM and a pulp-fiction hero where an attempt to facilitate friendly-relations through sharing possessions is successful. While neither Jules’s sharing of Brett’s burger, nor Jules and Vincents’ partaking of Jimmie’s gourmet coffee, helped nurture camaraderie, when Lance suggests to Vincent that they get high together and double-date (Lance essentially offers Trudy to Vincent), Vincent is shown pleased enough with the suggestion he might well have taken him up on it had he not already agreed to show his boss’s wife a good time.

When Vincent returns to Lance’s home, their friendship is tested: The SCM wants to stage an event that will help him better gauge just how strong and true a friendship might exist between an SCM and a pulp-fiction gangster. Just as Jules did previously, here Vincent calls upon a suburban friend—but to keep Mia from dying. There are some similarities between how Lance reacts to Vincent’s request and how Jimmie reacted to Jules’s. For instance, just as Jimmie points out there was no “sign saying dead nigger storage” on his lawn, here Lance says that Vincent can’t “bring some fucked up pooh-butt to my house.” But the person who sold Vincent the drugs responsible for the overdose cannot push suburban

propriety and be taken seriously. Vincent easily convinces Lance to assist him in bringing Mia into Lance's home, and the result is that the scene Jimmie feared would end his marriage actually occurs here: a wife watches a body being dragged about her suburban home. But while walking in on such a scene might well have moved Jimmie's wife to file for divorce, we know that human-pin-cushion Jodie is more accustomed to violent permeations of customarily sacred grounds.

Jodie yells at her husband—but she also ends up assisting Vincent and Lance in helping nurse Mia back to consciousness. And though we have a near-corpse and a violent stabbing in this scene, it ends harmoniously rather than in discord. That is, a scene pretty close to one we would find in a pulp-fiction novel occurs here within Lance's suburban home, and it proves much more wild ride than disaster. As Mia recovers, and they breathe a collective sigh of relief, they realize they have shared an experience which brought them—disparate as they still are—closer together as friends. And whereas elsewhere in the film the deliberate repetition of another's words alienates people from one another while racking up the tension (i.e., Jules' "say 'what' one more time—" and Jimmie's "don't fuckin' 'Jimmie me,' man"), Mia's response to Lance's request that she "say something" by saying, "something," feels relaxed, and is easing.

Within his daydream, and in this disorderly suburban home, the SCM has successfully managed to create what

postcolonial critics call a "hybrid space," that is, an "in-between space," a creative space wherein a "release from [traditional] singular identities" (Macey 192) becomes possible. He has fabricated a situation where an SCM uses what he always imagined he had over his pulp-fiction heroes—book smarts (though he never finds the black medical book, he does guide Vincent through the procedure)—to assist him in directing Vincent's brawn (Vincent is the one who pounds a needle though Mia's breastplate), so to make them a congruent pair. Indeed, this scene might serve to help the SCM imagine Lance as a more appropriate friend of Vincent's than Jules is. Perhaps the fact that the SCM daydreamer essentially divorces the two by having Jules become biblical while keeping Vincent pulp, shows he has grown to think of himself as someone his pulp-fiction hero might actually *prefer* to spend time with. It must be noted, though, that by the end of the daydream Vincent no longer seems as clearly identifiable as a pulp-fiction hero as he was at its beginning. Since he owes his demise to his interest in a pulp-fiction novel, Vincent might himself have become a hybrid—part pulp-fiction hero, part SCM. Perhaps in his daydream the SCM had a premonition of his virtual-reality future and decided it not *so* unlikely he might one day step up from being a pulp-fiction reader to becoming a hero himself. In the 3D-world of tomorrow, he may have intuited, that suitcase full of unadulterated dreams might just be his to keep.

Works Cited

- Macey, David. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Pulp Fiction*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Perf. Samuel Jackson, John Travolta. Miramax, 1994. DVD.

Splendid Isolation and Cruel Returns (November 2004)

Does Robinson Crusoe, in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, really believe he should have "settle[d] at home according to [his] Father's Desire[s]" (7)? Since the text shows he deemed living at home a life of captivity, and that he found the island he was stranded on very fulfilling, it's clear he's suffering from considerable self-deception here. Does Gulliver, in Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, really believe it was his misfortune that "Fortune, [his] [. . .] perpetual Enemy" prevented him from "pass[ing] the rest of his life among these admirable *Honyhnbhnm's*" (240)? Since he occupies himself much more with the affairs of his enemies than he does the accomplishments of friends, he clearly does not. For him as well, that is, the ostensible worst option is really the vastly preferred choice—for even if to gods, servitude is apparently only good if it empowers cruelty upon lessers upon your return home... allow me to elaborate.

It is hard to argue that Crusoe *comes* to regret his decision to leave his father, for just as soon as he "broke loose" (8)

from him he ostensibly knew right away what a colossal mistake it was to set out on his own. In fact, within the very same paragraph in which he broke loose he tells us he “began now seriously to reflect upon what [he] [. . .] had done, and how justly [he] [. . .] was overtaken by the Judgment of Heaven for [his] [. . .] wicked [decision to] leav[e] [his] [. . .] Father’s house, and [to] abandon [his] [. . .] Duty” (9).

Crusoe’s not conveying *any* happiness or exhilaration upon breaking free is puzzling. Surely he must have felt somewhat elated afterwards, experienced some kind of victory-related rush—why not relate this feeling? Why in his account does he depict no moment, in public or in private, of how he celebrated his release? Maybe there wasn’t any such moment, but I highly suspect there was, only in recounting his departure from his father he felt compelled to avoid conveying the pleasure he experienced in both disobeying his father and in finally starting upon a self-directed life.

Damning criticism of one’s parents is never an easy thing to just *lay down*—most times, our superego will in fact not stand for it, and will afflict us with the likes of castration anxiety or fears of abandonment should we insist on doing so. Crusoe certainly avoids overtly criticizing his father in his account—he describes him, rather, very appreciatively. We are told that his father was “a wise and grave man, [who] gave [him] [. . .] serious and excellent Counsel” (5), that his father was affectionate—“he press’d me earnestly, and in the most affectionate manner, not to play the young Man”—and sincere—his “Tears r[an] down his Face very plentifully” (7).

He would deter his son from pursuing the life he wants to pursue, but for generous reasons: he wants his son to “slide[e] gently thro’ the World, and sensibly tasting the Sweets of living, without the bitter” (7). Essentially, he wants for his son what the speaker of Lady Mary Chudleigh’s “The Resolve” wants for herself, to be “happy in [his] [. . .] humble state” (21). Crusoe dares say he “broke free,” but largely avoids assessing his former life so he could not but admit to himself that it really was the obvious—a cage—he had succeeded in breaking free from. And when he departs, Crusoe attends only to his own character flaws. We learn that he was “obstinately deaf to all Proposals” (Defoe 8), and that he “consulted neither Father or Mother [about his departure] [. . .]; but left them to hear of it as they might, without asking God’s blessing, or my Father’s, without any Consideration of Circumstances or Consequences, and in an ill Hour” (9).

His father offers him a life where he “was under no Necessity of seeking [his] [. . .] Bread” (7). He would be fed, he would be safe. He would know a routine life, full of happiness, but void of excitement. He would never know from his own experience if the one his father presented him with was the best available, but his father tells him he would still know from everyone’s envying him (6). We might wonder, however, if everyone really would envy a man who could never find his way to “leave [his] [. . .] Father’s house” (9). Perhaps a good number might actually think that such a man, never knowing what it feels like to live on your own, lived but a posher one one would *force* upon a slave.

I suspect Crusoe thought as much, but was fearful of directly lambasting his father's intention to keep him rooted in place. However, if we accept Norman Holland argument that "unsavory wishful fantasies" are reworked in fiction so that they are "consciously satisfying [to] [. . .] the ego and unconsciously satisfying to the deep wishes being acted out by the literary work" (104), we find that he does convey his anger at this father elsewhere in his account.

Crusoe allowed for some textual padding, for some time to lapse, before making clear what it is about people and places that draws him to break free from them—not much, though, for just twenty pages after his departure, he recounts for us how he narrowly avoided living a life of captivity. A Moorish captain captures him at sea, admires him (he thought him valuable property for he was "young and nimble and fit for his Business" [Defoe 18]), and decides to keep him as his servant. Because he is being compelled to live the life of a domestic, forever "look[ing] after his little Garden," tending to "his House" and "his Ship," Crusoe decides his situation "could not be worse" (18). He would be "commanded" and "order'd" (30) about. He therefore "meditated nothing but [his] [. . .] Escape" (18), for he "was resolved to have [his] [. . .] Liberty" (21). Being a valuable slave, he might have been well kept, but what bothers Crusoe is that *someone else* is determining his life. He despises the idea of orbiting around someone else, of being someone who lives to satisfy *other people's* needs. Though he does conceive of the Moorish captain as an agent of (his father's) prophecy (28), he also

makes clear that the Moor is a tyrant, and that his thoughts of liberation are fully justified. But if he finds living a provisioning but kept domestic life so odious here, we should understand the true mover behind his leaving his father, not wanderlust, but rather staunch refusal of the caged life. He *was* capable of an honest assessment of such a life, but could manage it only where his honesty would not look to insult or condemn his father.

Crusoe, however, never admits to being right in disobeying his father. The way in which Gulliver relates to his Houyhnhnm masters is about how he would admit he ought to have attended to him. The Houyhnhnms and Crusoe's father are similar to one another, valuing much the same things—"Temperance, *Industry*, *Exercise*, and *Cleanliness*" (251), by the Houyhnhnms, and "Temperance, Moderation, Quietness, [and] [. . .] Health" (6), by Crusoe's father. However, unlike Crusoe, Gulliver ostensibly is never interested in breaking free from wise fathers, but rather in spending the whole of his life amongst his new-found betters. He tells us he was so eager to learn the Houyhnhnms' ways that he "never presumed to speak, except in answer to a Question; and then [he] [. . .] did it with inward Regret, because it was a Loss of so much Time for improving" (259) himself. He admires how their young do exactly as their parents bid: "[Y]oung Couple[s] meet and are joined, merely because it is the Determination of their Parents and Friends: It is what they see done every Day; and they look upon it as one of the necessary Actions in a reasonable Being" (250). He

takes pleasure in being their servant, appreciates their reasoning nature, their evident superiority to him, and agrees to follow their directions to the best of his ability. Therefore, though he is commanded and ordered about (e.g., “my master commanded me silence” [2417]), he acknowledges no reason for complaint.

Gulliver believes he will live a life of relative peace and tranquility—the sort of life Crusoe’s father offers Crusoe. But “In the Midst of all this Happiness, when [he] [. . .] looked upon [himself] [. . .] to be fully settled for Life” (260), he learns that he must depart the island. He tells us he was devastated by the news—“I was struck with the utmost Grief and Despair at my Master’s Discourse; and being unable to support the Agonies I was under, I fell into a Swoon at his Feet” (262)—and upon later recounting it, damns Fortune for the terrible turn. But if Fortune was indeed responsible, she deserved better than that from him—for Gulliver really wanted to leave, only this wasn’t something he could own up to.

Gulliver becomes a servant, and we hear of how he obeys orders and commands—but I am not arguing that like Crusoe he wanted to depart so to be free from captivity. Rather, I think he was ready to leave the Houyhnhnms because he was *done with them*; they had served their purpose, and had nothing more to offer. The Houyhnhnms had heard all of his complaints concerning the European culture he loathed, validated his surly opinion of it, and provided him with justification for thinking himself superior to the rest of

the Yahoos. This done, it was time to return home to be within easy reach of said Yahoos, whom he could now subjugate without self-reproach.

The Houyhnhnms evict Gulliver from their island for fear that, however unlikely, he could yet still lead a revolt. They ultimately judge that Gulliver, still a Yahoo, is not to be trusted—and they are right in this, he isn’t. He quite readily misleads his readers, for instance. Though he claimed he was primarily interested in the Houyhnhnms, and though he does provide us with “some account of the manner and customs of” those “which it was indeed [his] [. . .] principal Study to learn” (249), he actually ends up spending the best part of his account detailing *European* life and manners. He says he was compelled to provide this information to the Houyhnhnms. His master was eager to be informed of “the whole State of *Europe*,” “often desiring fuller Satisfaction,” and his master’s immense desire (an example of excess in a Houyhnhnm?) ostensibly accounts for why the discussion of European life possibly seemed—for *us*—“a Fund of Conversation not to be exhausted” (228). He tells us he would rather have kept quiet and studied their ways, but since no one compelled him to relate all of these details to “us,” he clearly is much more interested in criticizing his previous home than in detailing the various what-nots of Houyhnhnms’ oh-so-compelling how-tos.

Note how even when establishing what his life amongst the Houyhnhnms was like he does so in a way which has us actually mostly attending to European life:

I enjoyed perfect Health of Body, and Tranquillity of Mind; I did not feel the Treachery or Inconstancy of a Friend, nor the Injuries of a secret or open Enemy. I had no Occasion of bribing, flattering or pimping, to procure the Favor of any great Man, or of his Minion. I wanted no Fence against Fraud or Oppression: Here was neither Physician to destroy my Body, nor Lawyer to ruin my Fortune: No Informer to watch my Words and Actions, or forge Accusations against me for Hire; Here were no Gibbers, Censurers, Backbiters, Pickpockets, Highwaymen, House-breakers, Attorneys, Bawds, Buffoons, Gamesters, Politicians, Wits, Spleneticks, tedious Talkers, Controvertists, Ravishers, Murderers, Robbers, Virtuoso's; no Leaders or Followers of Party and Faction; no Encouragers to Vice, by Seducement or Examples: No Dungeon, Axes, Gibbets, Whipping-posts, or Pillories; No cheating Shopkeepers or Mechanics: No Pride, Vanity or Affectation: No Fops, Bullies, Drunkards, strolling Whores, or Poxes: No ranting, lewd, expensive Wives: No stupid, proud Pedants: No importunate, over-bearing, quarrelsome, noisy, roaring, empty, conceited, swearing Companions: No Scoundrels, raised from the Dust upon the Merit of their Vices; or Nobility thrown into it on account of their Virtues: No Lords, Fiddlers, Judges or Dancing-masters (258-59).

Obviously, if this passage reflects how he experienced life amongst the Houyhnhnms, European life was very much on his mind while amongst them. And, in this passage at least, the outpouring of details, of complaint, cannot be accounted for by Houyhnhnms' demand for fuller satisfaction.

Since the text shows that Gulliver enjoyed all his complaining, we should not think he was prepared to leave it all behind him. Rather, we should ask ourselves if what he really wanted was for his natural inclination to believe himself superior to find sanction from some higher power, noting that the Houyhnhnms, so "orderly and rational, so acute and judicious" (211), are also *so perfectly suited, are so "right,"* to help him out with this. Though they judge Gulliver a Yahoo, they deem him unique for his race—unlike other Yahoos, he, much like a Houyhnhnm, is "Teachable, Civil and Clean" (218). Why would he want that? Because he is sadist who wants to bully people, but needs validation to make his inclination sound. When he returns home, we note his domineering ways: the first thing he recounts for us is how quickly and unsparingly he established order in his household. He is disgusted by his family, and will not let them near him. He abuses us readers as well. After he explains how much his family disgusted him, he speaks to his "gentle Reader" (272). *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* teaches gentle contemporary students that Gulliver must be being ironic here, for his "gentle readers must be Yahoos" (2443). But

Longman is not on the mark, for not ironic or playful, Gulliver is here simply being cruel: he insinuates that his readers, who very likely would prefer to understand themselves gentle / genteel, are in truth, foul. As we observe from the way he treats his family, Yahoos aren't worth being civil to, and cannot be effectively handled civilly in any case. They are savages that need to have their savagery pointed out to them (in between beatings, very likely) so they will know improvement, and just possibly, seek it out, however much beside the point.

There are other times where he expresses his dismay at, and his dislike for, his readers. When he writes, "[h]aving already lived three Years in this Country, the Reader I suppose will expect, that I should, like other Travelers, give him some Account of the Manner and Customs of its Inhabitants" (249), we sense him sighing, even sneering, at our expectations. His being resigned to placate us suggests he deems us "the most unteachable of all Animals, [with] [our] [. . .] Capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry Burthens" (248). Elsewhere he insinuates that his readers—so unlike the Houyhnhnms—are largely uncaring and completely self-interested: "This is enough to say upon the Subject of my Dyet, wherewith other Travelers fill their books, as if the Readers were personally concerned, whether we fare well or ill" (217).

It is useful to think of Gulliver as intending to think himself literally put-off by his readers, in finding himself physically, spacially drawn away from them, for perhaps

Gulliver prefers to imagine us at a distance to avoid any reoccurrence of the physical revulsion he experienced when his wife embraced him upon his return home. However, it is of course more appropriate to look to *Crusoe* for an account of the pleasure had from commanding a wide-birth of physical space. One of Crusoe's first actions on the island is to build a "Fortification" (59). But though he fears hostile engagements with savages, none occur until many years go by. In the meantime, he extends his knowledge of the island, the breadth of his domain. He develops a country bower and grows crops. Incrementally he "prepare[s] more [and more] land" (101). The expansion of his domain expands his sense of himself, until finally, as the scholar Pat Rogers argues, "we should consider Crusoe's increasing readiness to see himself as 'Governour' [. . .] as [him feeling] the monarch of all he surveys" (44).

Crusoe certainly enjoys being "a monarch." He tells us, "I descended a little on the side of that delicious vale, surveying it with a secret kind of pleasure [. . .] to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in inheritance as completely as any lord of a manor in England" (Defoe 99). Rogers argues that Crusoe was indeed having so much indulgent fun that "it is hard not to feel that Defoe was indulging at some level in a fantasy of himself as colonial proprietor" (45).

Michael Boardman argues that "[t]he situation of exile, even the peace that comes from his mastering of nature,

might seem less than ideal as a scene for the agonics of repentance” (56). I concur, and believe we should wonder just how much of even his initial despair owed to a concern to not show his father up. His father told him to avoid the “secret burning Lust of Ambition” (Defoe 7) and prophesized that “if he goes abroad he will be the miserablest Wretch that was ever born” (8), and Crusoe felt the need to prove his father right, insisting to the forefront of his consciousness that the island was his despair, while relaxing to his default—ready enjoyment of the island—when the guilt had been dealt with. But even when he despairs, the text actually works *against* summing up his overall experience of exile as despairing. For example, when he finishes listing the “Evil” and “Good” things about life on the island, he concludes that “here was an undoubted Testimony, that there was scarce any Condition in the World so miserable, but there was something *Negative* or something *Positive* to be thankful for in it” (58). Yet when we look at the list we notice that far more is written under the Good side than under the Evil side of the ledger. This discrepancy is especially significant since, unlike a listing of debits and credits, the Good side is written in response to that put under the Evil side. That is, the weight of his interest resides in countering what he’d put down on the ledger’s damning left-hand side.

As his account proceeds other things accrue to him that also ought fairly to be put on the Good side, if only he could manage it. Remarkably, for instance, he apparently loses his inclination to wander. Even though, after exploring the rest

of the island, he admits he “had pitch’d upon a Place to fix [his] [. . .] Abode, which was by far the worst Part of the Country” (100), he decides he would not “by any Means [. . .] remove” (101). Hearing this, we have further cause to wonder if he ever really suffered from wanderlust, that is, if perhaps he only felt the need to “run quite away” (7-8) when his life was being determined for him. Crusoe also acquires wisdom. He tells us he learned that “we never see the true State of our Condition, till it is illustrated to us by its Contraries; nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it” (118). And from this statement we know of another thing he wouldn’t but certainly *ought* to place under the Good side of his ledger—specifically, that his father was clearly wrong to deter him from setting out on his own. We remember his father telling him he should live the middling life, for that way he would “tast[e] the sweets of living without the bitter.” But Crusoe concludes that if one lives without being “expos’d to [. . .] vicissitudes” (6), one cannot enjoy life, for those who know only the good things in life would never know or “feel that they are happy” (7). Crusoe decides that the venturesome life, the life his father did not want him to lead, actually lead him to know and therefore savor happiness.

Crusoe individuates from his father on the island, a father, whose understanding of what was best for his son was clearly limited. Though even as an older man Crusoe still persists in believing he would have better off had he never left home, in his covert challenges to his father’s benevolence and wisdom, in his written articulations of the pleasures and

awareness he took from a way of life his father would think of as befouling, he establishes the evident rightness of his decision to set out on his own. He is to be believed when he tells us he “thought [he] liv’d really very happily in all things, except that of Society” (122), and later when he tells us how “in [his] [. . .] twenty third Year of residence in this Island, [. . .] [he] was so naturalized to the Place, and to the Manner of Living, that could [. . .] [he] have but enjoy’d the Certainty that no Savages would come to the Place to disturb [. . .] [him] , [. . .] [he] could have been content to have capitulated for spending the rest of [. . .] [his] Time there, even to the last Moment, till [. . .] [he] had laid me down and dy’d, like the old Goat in the Cave” (152). For Crusoe had found for himself pretty close to what the speaker of Anne Finch’s “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat” desperately wanted, namely, “A sweet, but absolute retreat, / ‘Mongst paths so lost, and trees so high, / That the world may ne’er invade” (3-5). Gulliver, on the other hand, since he never convinces us he is more interested in the Houyhnhnms than he is in criticizing European society, also never convinces us he wanted to leave it all behind him. Rather, he shows himself—as the speaker of Miss W—’s “The Gentleman’s Study” assesses Jonathan Swift—just someone who actually would rather “write of [. . .] odious men” (4) than “write of angels” (1).

Works Cited

Damrosch, David ed. *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1999.

- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Holland, Norman. *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968. Print.
- Rogers, Pat. *Robinson Crusoe*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979. Print.
- Swift, Jonathon. *Gulliver’s Travels*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

The Devil Made Me Enjoy it (November 2005)

Though I am aware that many readers of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* are dismayed by the extent of the violence in the novel, I am not surprised to learn that many readers actually find the novel an exhilarating read. That is, I cannot pretend the pleasure readers take in the novel is a problem I would like to solve, for I too enjoyed the novel—and hold McCarthy accountable. Since being victimized can lead us to enjoy becoming perpetrators, McCarthy actually encourages us to enjoy Glanton's mercenaries' merciless but efficacious slaughter by first having us ride along side the hapless Captain White. When Glanton and his riders massacre the Delaware village, we may in fact not only understand it as an answer to the Apache's slaughter, but experience it as a satisfying response to previous abuse. McCarthy thereby maneuvers us into agreeing with the judge that one lives best when one lives like Glanton and his riders do, by embracing one's inner savagery.

McCarthy begins his novel in such a way that, regardless

of the nature of our past experiences, we will know what it is to be weak and vulnerable. He involves us in his story-world by speaking directly to us and by encouraging us to identify with the protagonist, kid. In the text's first line his narrator explicitly speaks to us. He acknowledges our presence: we thereafter cannot pretend to be detached observers, distinct from what we "observe." He beckons us forward so that we "[s]ee the kid"; and when he then refers to the "[n]ight of your birth" (3), we might still think him speaking to us. He sets the kid off on a journey similar to our own: *we all* venture into unfamiliar territories. And as the unfamiliar land quickly also proves a very dangerous one, mightn't we as well hope to hitch alongside some of those already accustomed to it while we acclimatize ourselves? I am suggesting that when the kid signs up with Captain White he brings with him other riders—us, the readers of McCarthy's novel. McCarthy has us associate with White's gang, if only for comfort and security. And more the pity, for Captain White's expedition serves as a kind of exemplum, the sort of story the judge would use to demonstrate the rightness of his understanding of men.

At the end of the novel the judge proclaims that there are three sorts of men. There are those who aren't warriors, who can't move other men—the least of men. Then there are two sorts of warriors: those who can dance, and those who can't. True dancers are those "who have offered up [themselves] [. . .] entire to the blood of war" (331). True dancers kill because killing "speaks to [their] [. . .] inmost heart" (331). False dancers, on the other hand, try and

establish the moral righteousness of their killing ways. Since Captain White sees himself as an “instrument of liberation in a dark and troubled land” (34), White is one such false dancer. He aims, that is, to civilize a land, to protect citizens “from the notorious packs of cut-throats presently infesting the routes which they are obliged to travel” (34). No doubt he enjoys the slaughter, but as he is apparently intent on being a wealthy landowner, he hopes for some future glimpse of pastoral order rather more than he does ongoing war. Those whom the judge would deem true dancers, sadden and disgust him. When the kid first meets White, the kid notes that he was apparently “sad[ened]” (33) by the efforts of “a heathen horde [which] rides over the land looting and killing with total impunity” (33). Unable to give himself entire to the blood of war, White can only imagine them as those “who cannot govern themselves” (34).

Since the judge believes that “[m]oral law is an invention of mankind of the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak” (250), he would despise White’s justification for war. He would judge White doomed in his efforts to enlighten a dark land, for he believes that moral law is essentially very weak. According to him, since men are natural killers, moral law cannot help but be “subvert[ed]” “at every turn” “by [h]istorical law” (250). And in how he portrays White and his riders’ journey through the desert, McCarthy confirms judge’s assessment that those who aim to civilize a naturally chaotic world are weak in spirit, and doomed to failure.

White and his party travel through a hostile landscape. Nature can only be thought of as provisioning in that it doesn’t forsake them the forewarning of their doom: “[t]hose first days they saw no game, no birds save buzzards” (42). And we notice how oppositely they are described. We are told that “the mountains on the sudden skyline stark and black and livid like a land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear” (47)—the mountains are stark and menacing; the riders, in contrast, are meek and anonymous: they “rode with their heads down, faceless under their hats” (45). Nature’s beasts are mythical and magnificent, its horses “rac[ed] on the plains pounding their shadows down the night and leaving in the moonlight a vaporous dust like the palest stain of their passing.” (47). In contrast, the riders’ “animals were failing [. . .] [:] the wretched ponies huddled and whimpered like dogs” (47). Nature eagerly anticipates devouring White and his men; at dusk, the sun stood like a “head of a great red phallus [that] [. . .] puls[ed] malevolent[ly] behind them” (45). The sun brings shadows as “tentacles [determined] to bind them [i.e., White and his riders] to the darkness yet to come” (45), and White’s men are fearful: “They halted in the dark to recruit the animals and some of the men stowed their arms in the wagons for fear of drawing the lightning” (47). And they behave as those who are desperate would, as those who suspect they might soon die would—they pray to God.

The judge gauges that it requires a “largeness of heart” (330) in order to survive the desert. It requires, that is, ample

inner resources and readiness to use them. White's men are portrayed as if they lack the inner resources to deal with such a harsh terrain. Unprepared to deal with a landscape which refuses to just offer up either game or water, and disinclined to look to themselves to improvise, they ask God for help. We should note that turning to God is always a bad idea in *Blood Meridian*, for if God answers, He answers in blood. For instance, the kid stumbles upon corpses of Christina Mexicans who "barricaded themselves in [a] [. . .] house of God against the heathen" (60). These Christians owed their death, not their salvation, to those above: "savages had hacked holes in the roof and shot them down from above" (60). Since just previous to their request we are told of how "[t]he thunder moved up from the southwest and lightning lit the desert all about them, blue and barren, great clanging reaches ordered out of the absolute night like some demon kingdom summoned up" (47), we sense that God is at work concocting an equally appropriate deliverance for Hayward and his men.

When White's sergeant finally sees the "heathen horde," he exclaims, "Oh my god!" (53). Since this is the first time "God" appears in the text since Hayward's prayer, McCarthy has us understand the horde as His response to (wayward?) Hayward's prayer. It seems an appropriate response to deliver to men who, even though they understand His lands as "the high road to hell" (45), still insist on understanding Him as responding sympathetically to requests from the downtrodden. The portrayal of the Apache warriors—that is,

to the devastating "legion of horrors" (52), which ride "down upon [White and his riders] [. . .] like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of christian reckoning" (53)—also responds to White's assessment of the fighting strength of uncivil men. The captain had informed the kid that those they were fighting were a "race of degenerates" (34) who could be bested by "unpaid irregulars" (34). McCarthy shows, instead, that those who kill with impunity are the strongest, not the weakest, of men.

McCarthy ensures that Captain White's last words show him up as a fool. In response to the sergeant's query regarding the identity of the group advancing before them, White answers, "I make it a parcel of heathen stockthieves is what I make it" (51). We, of course, might first appreciate why White thought defeating these "thieves" would prove such easy "sport" (51), for McCarthy restricts our vision so we see no more than what White and his sergeant can see through their telescope, meaning we see that there "were [but] cattle, mules, horses [. . .] [.] [and] a handful of ragged indians mending the outer flanks of the herd with their nimble ponies" (51). McCarthy situates us on the desert plain, draws us into contemplating the nature of the group before us, and thereby positions us so that when the horde materializes, we should count *ourselves* amongst those caught out in surprise and subsequently trodden upon. Very likely, we feel some of the horror, some of the devastation experienced by White and his riders before they perish. And most certainly, unless we are masochists, it cannot be a

pleasure to be conjoined to Saxons who come to know this:

[S]ome with nightmare faces painted on their breasts, riding down the unhorsed Saxons and spearing and clubbing them and leaping from their mounts with knives and running about on the ground with a peculiar bandlegged trot like creatures driven to alien forms of locomotion and stripping the clothes from the dead and seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals, some of the savages so slathered up with gore they might have rolled in it like dogs and some who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows. And now the horses of the dead came pounding out of the smoke and dust and circled with flapping leather and wild manes and eyes whited with fear like the eyes of the blind and some were feathered with arrows and some lanced through and stumbling and vomiting blood as they wheeled across the killing ground and clattered from sight again. Dust stanching the wet and naked heads of the scalped who with the fringe of hair below their wounds and tonsured to the bone now lay like maimed and naked monks in the bloodslaked dust and everywhere the

dying groaned and gibbered and horses lay screaming.
(54)

I, at least, was sufficiently revolted by this scene that I essentially counted myself amongst those downed, and therefore was disappointed that McCarthy continued to compound my sense of the kid as a perpetual victim. Yes, the kid “wondrously” (55) survives the attack, but following the Apache raid the kid again and again experiences what it is to be weak and vulnerable.

The kid *is* as vulnerable as a little kid in this part of *Blood Meridian*. When a Mexican captain offers him water, the captain lets the kid know he could just as easily have slain him. The captain likens him to a little lamb that calls for his mother, that is, to someone ripe for slaughter by wolves (65). Though wolves don’t catch him, Mexican soldiers do, and McCarthy describes him as such easy game: “the kid was standing by the cart pissing when the soldiers rode into the yard. They seized him and tied his hands behind him and they looked in the cart” (69). While he’s imprisoned, we learn that “[a]ll day small boys perched on the walls and watched by shifts and pointed and jabbered. They’d walk around the parapet and try to piss down on sleepers in the shade” (71). The kid throws a stone at one of them and manages to scare them away, but by now we likely wish him capable of a more devastating response to tormentors.

Social service professionals would tell us that those who’ve been badly victimized can be expected to join gangs

for revenge—but this would come as little surprise to us, for after repeatedly having his vulnerability exposed and exploited, surely we are willing the kid to ride with winners for a change, whatever their disposition. And as if perhaps responding to our need, winners *do* show up: Glanton and his outriders come into town. Better—they're recruiting.

Our first description of Glanton and his riders makes them seem the sort of men who would have anticipated and therefore could have dealt with the Apache horde that devastated White and his entourage. Like the Apaches, Glanton's riders are described as a formidable "horde" (79) whose visage is so horrifying and awesome it "stun[s]" (78) onlookers. They are "viscous looking humans mounted on unshod indian ponies riding half drunk through the streets, bearded, barbarous, clad in the skins of animals stitched up with thews and armed with weapons of every description, revolvers of enormous weight and bowie knives the size of clay-more and short twobarreled rifles with bores you could stick your thumbs in" (78). Unlike White, the leader of this gang is a true dancer. We know early on—for example, from his making animals "dance" while testing his guns—that Glanton will not pretend to be a moral crusader. Being a member of his company is made to seem a privilege, unworthy of most: the kid and Toadvine have to pass themselves off as "seasoned indiankillers" (79) in order to be counted part of it (all the kid had to do was to best and kill a non-combatant [i.e., a bartender] for White to seek him out). And in a way, it is: while the kid rides with him, the kid

doesn't know defeat for some time. Riding with Glanton, in fact, seems to respond to, to quit, a number of unpleasant experiences the kid had while riding with White.

For example, McCarthy has us attend to how nature "relates" to Glanton and his gang, just as he did with White and his riders. But whereas with White nature was an opponent, nature has no interest in besting Glanton or his riders—they seem, rather, in accord. We are told, for example, that "their track across the land reflected in its faint arcature the movements of the earth itself" (153), and that "the men as they rode turned black in the sun from the blood on their clothes and their faces and then paled slowly in the rising dust until they assumed once more the color of the land through which they passed" (160). We shouldn't be surprised that nature and Glanton's riders coalesce, for as we have seen, nature is often portrayed in the novel as malevolent, black-in-spirit—and therefore akin to Glanton's riders who "tread[ed] their thin and flaring shadows until they had crossed altogether into the darkness which so well became them" (163).

Some of the activities hereto associated with defeat in the text are recalled and transformed while the kid rides with Glanton. For the reader, they begin to accrue different, more appealing, associations. For instance, urinating has thus far been associated with the kid's capture and humiliation. But while the kid rides with Glanton, he hears from the ex-priest how their companion, the judge, miraculously once saved all their lives by getting them to piss into a gunpowder mix he

was preparing. McCarthy phrases the judge's request for urine in a way that has us recall Hayward's prayer for help. The judge tells them to "piss, [. . .] piss for your very souls" (132), and we might remember as we hear this White's men encouraging Hayward to "[p]ray it up" (47) for rain. But while Hayward's prayer for rain may have rained down upon them the horde, the judge's request for urine ensures an easy victory: the text could not provide surer evidence that those who rely on their own resources are the ones who can expect to thrive.

Some might object to my linking the kid to the judge as they are never characterized as natural companions in the way that the judge and Glanton for instance are. However, both of them are to be counted amongst those referred to when "Glanton's riders" becomes the composite "they," and owing to the preponderance of paragraphs which begin with his pronoun (often with "They rode" or "They ride"), many of us likely come to imagine them as conjoined throughout their journeys. The narrator overtly tells us at one point that: "They rode on. They rode like men invested with a purpose whose origins were antecedent to the, like blood legatees of an order both imperative and remote. For although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined they made a [. . .] communal soul" (152).

Since I hold the description of the Apache attack as too vivid to be readily shaken off by the reader, I believe that as we hear of Glanton and his riders' communal aspects, of how they ride and ride, and of how they ride with a purpose, that

many of us sense and at some level hope, their mission is to provide a Saxon response to the Apache's massacre we are still suffering from. I previously quoted a lengthy passage from the Apache's massacre of White's riders hoping I would thereby remind my reader of how affecting, how awful it was to encounter that passage for the first time. I also did so in hopes of persuading my reader that this scene involving Glanton's riders' massacre of the Delaware village recalls, replies to, and quits it:

Within that first minute the slaughter had become general. Women were screaming and naked children and one old man tottered forth waving a pair of white pantaloons. The horsemen moved among them and slew them with clubs or knives. A hundred tethered dogs were howling and others were racing crazed among the huts ripping at one another and at the tied dogs nor would this bedlam and clamor cease or diminish from the first moment the riders entered the village. Already a number of the huts were afire and a whole enfilade of refugees had begun steaming north along the shore wailing crazily with the riders among them like herdsmen clubbing down the laggards first. [. . .] When Glanton and his chiefs swung back through the village people were running out under the horses' hooves and the horses were plunging and some of the men were moving on foot among the huts with torches and dragging the victims out,

slathered and dripping with blood, hacking at the dying and decapitating those who knelt for mercy. There were in the camp a number of Mexican slaves and these ran forth calling out in Spanish and were brained or shot and one of the Delawares emerged from the smoke with a naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden stones and swung them by the heels each in turn and bashed their heads against the stones so that the brains burst forth through the fontanel in a bloody spew and humans on fire came shrieking forth like berserkers and the riders hacked them down with their enormous knives and a young woman ran up and embraced the bloodied forefeet of Glanton's warhorse. (156)

As with the Apache attack, we have a "great vomit of gore" (98). The difference is that it is more appropriate to describe the narrative discharge this time as orgasmic. I say this because we now ride with the perpetrator, not the victim, in an excited release upon of a village we likely felt we had been preparing for.

Like before an orgasm, the paragraphs that preceded the attack have a regular rhythm. Again we are offered a succession of paragraphs that begin with "they." Specifically, we are told that "They followed" (149), that "They passed" (149), that "For the next two weeks they would ride" (151), that "They cut the throats" (151), that "They crossed the del

Norte" (152), that "That night they were visited" (152), that "Toward the morning they saw fires" (152), that "When the company set forth in the evening they continued south as before" (153), that "They saw to their arms" (154), that "They'd driven a stick into the ground" (154), that "They reached the north end" (154) before hearing how "They led the [. . .] horses" into war" (155). On the Vintage edition of *Blood Meridian*, a case for my argument can be made just by looking at the paragraphs on the page preceding the attack (page 154). Each paragraph is roughly the same length, is reasonably short, and begins with a monosyllabic word beginning with "T."

The effect of encountering these two massacres sequentially is very different than if we had done so simultaneously. It is as inappropriate to point to the narrator's referring to Glanton's "chiefs" (156) and argue that with this McCarthy shows he would not have us mistake these pitiless Saxon marauders as any different from the Apaches they're about to decimate, as it is to argue that the American CNN embeds who rode tanks intending to lay waste to Baghdad in response to the 9-11 New York devastation, showed the essential equivalence between Muslim and American warriors. No, just as those who felt victimized by the 9-11 attack rooted for the American tank divisions while they crushed Baghdad, since we suffered from the Apache attack, we are drawn to ride with Glanton and root for his gang—*likely whatever* the total number of body cavities they end up caving in, arms and legs they end up cleaving off, pleading, sunken,

defeated heads they return only to decapitate. And we would done so even if they had dressed themselves near Indian out of fraternal respect for Apaches' true warrior blood. That is, if we experienced the Apache attack as our defeat, the Delaware massacre *is only* our revenge.

Some might argue we aren't likely to root for puppy-killers, but I believe McCarthy portrays Glanton so that even if we hate him, we likely still admire him. Glanton is someone who "eats lead and shits bullets"—an unrelenting force (His bravado never ceases, not even at the moment of his death.). But not just this: for while in battle, most sentences that begin with "Glanton" are usually followed with him accomplishing the difficult in a meticulously perfect manner (An example: "Glanton brought the rifle to the crook of his arm and capped one drum and rotated the barrels and capped the other. He did not take his eyes from the Apaches" [158]; and another: "Glanton drew his rifle from its scabbard and shot the two lead horses and resheathed the rifle and drew his pistol and began to fire between the actual ears of his horse" [156].)—Glanton is so perfect in this environment most often we feel the universe is simply ceding his antagonists to him, because in awe, it knows it doesn't have a hope. *And for all his compelling competence and charisma*, we are his as well.

McCarthy manipulates us into admiring Glanton, just as he manipulates us into enjoying Glanton's evil ways, and we must ask ourselves why he does so. Would he have us shotgun and tomahawk our way through life? Does he want us to give ourselves entire to the blood of war, even if this

just means spilling over carts toward the last available bit of clearance at a grocery store? I would like to think he wrote the novel hoping to make us aware of our susceptibility to manipulation, but since I am arguing it affects us primarily subliminally, I don't think this was intention. Instead, for all his talk of God, McCarthy has me thinking he clearly wrote it while "the devil was at his elbow" (19).

Work Cited

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage, 1985. Print.

Worthy Companions (March 2005)

Evelina, in Frances Burney's *Evelina*, and Werther, in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Young Werther*, might seem the opposite of one another, for they seek out such opposite company—Evelina, the high-born, Werther, the low-grounded. However, though their eyes are cast in different directions, their inclinations are one and the same: they both seek admiration from whomever most appropriate, to confirm themselves superior to their own particular worst-sort of people.

After Evelina's first social outing in London, Mrs. Mirvan relates to her, Lovel's, Lord Orville's, and Sir Clement's assessment of her (i.e., Evelina's) behavior at the party. Since Evelina, as much as Mrs. Mirvan, essentially has been eavesdropping, we know that her desire to know what others think of her is strong enough for it to out-duel her concern to be seen as well-bred—and this is saying something, as we shall see. Evelina attends most closely to how Lord Orville judged her. In the letter in which she

informs Mr. Villars of how they assessed her, Evelina ruminates only on those words Lord Orville used to describe her—"A poor weak girl![,] 'ignorant or mischievous!'" (40), and for good reason, since Lord Orville is characterized as exactly the sort of gentleman whose good opinion mattered most in eighteenth-century English society.

Paul Gordon Scott argues that social order in eighteenth-century England required the cowering presence of superior, singular gentlemen, who, along with ideal manners, possessed a penetrating "voyeuristic gaze that disciplines subjects by observing them" (88). Gordon argues that the ideal gentleman in eighteenth-century English society was, then, someone who both caused and eased social dis-ease. He was someone like Lord Orville, whose own judgmental gaze is employed in ensuring that bad behavior, which according to Orville requires "immediate notice [. . .] for it encroaches when it is tolerated" (113), is policed. Lord Orville's gaze is ideal for the purpose, for his vision is informed by "the cold eye of unimpassioned philosophy," which allows him to view, for example, women and art simultaneously without allowing "the heart [. . .] to interfere and make all objects but one (namely, a beautiful woman) insipid and uninteresting" (119).

Sir Clement is the one who makes this assessment of the prowess of Lord Orville's singularly disinterested "eye," and in the scene where the three men assess Evelina's character, he finds the eye focused in on him. Sir Clement calls Evelina an "angel" (38), but Lord Orville, disliking an inflated assessment of her informed principally by Sir Clement's

desire for mischief, insists she is not a “Helen” (39) but rather a “pretty modest-looking girl” (38). Lovel, having been humiliated by her preference for Lord Orville, eagerly makes use of Sir Clement’s suggestion that Evelina might be a “parson’s daughter” (39) to deem her coarse and lowly. Sir Clement insists she is “too sensible to be *ignorant*” (39), but Lord Orville will not play along, as he is uninterested in recovering her character for libertine play. He knows she “affront[ed] [Lovell],” probably guesses right that her laughter betrayed her “enjoy[ment] [of] his mortification” (40), and understands that regardless of whether her behavior was born out of ignorance or out of mischief, it remains inexcusable. But simply because the behavior is so unacceptable to Lord Orville he deemed it unnecessary to inquire as to motive, does not mean we should assume both explanations for her behavior are equally damning—for they are in no way that! For if her behavior owed to ignorance, she is doomed: she has no chance of ever judging herself worthy of Lord Orville. But if she is and was mischievous, the novel suggests she may not be so much fallen as she is *endowed*.

The exchange between Lovel and Sir Clement helps us understand “ignorance” as the opposite of sensible, the opposite of genteel. For Evelina, to be ignorant would mean to be less the country gentleman’s daughter Sir Clement prefers to see her as and more the country bumpkin the likes of Lovel and Madame Duval (75) are convinced her upbringing has made for her. Anyone akin to Madame Duval or to the Branghton family has no chance of becoming

sensible. Mr. Villars at one point expresses his wish that he could change Madame Duval’s plans, but argues that “[h]er character, and the violence of her disposition, intimidate me from making the attempt: she is too ignorant for instruction, too obstinate for entreaty, and too weak for reason” (142). We know, too, that Evelina gauges the Branghtons so obstinate their manners cannot be improved upon; in fact, she guesses they probably already consider themselves genteel (195).

Several characters characterized as libertines (with the exception of Lord Merton), on the other hand, are not only redeemable—witness what happens to Evelina’s true father at the end of the novel—but possess positive qualities which make them more similar to than different from the novel’s most sensible characters. Sir Clement is a libertine. He, unlike Lord Orville, takes pleasure in hearing how Evelina humiliated Lovel. But he is also someone whose own status as genteel is not compromised in doing so. In this, Sir Clement bears resemblance to the restoration libertines who engaged in “shaming rituals [which bore resemblance to that] of non-urbane and impolite society” (24) to “enforce rather than dissolve social hierarchy” (James Grantham Turner 247). And we note that throughout the novel he involves himself in activities that help distinguish the genteel from the lowly, which seem designed, intended, to remind the lowly of their dooming inadequacies. If we understand Sir Clement and Lord Orville as representing two different sorts of gentlemen, both of whom had their time as socially sanctioned

embodiments of moral righteousness, then we can understand Evelina's decision to twice establish how exactly their seemingly similar or even identical social behavior actually do actually differ, seem but an appropriate thing for her to do.

The very fact that Evelina compares the two makes them similar, for according to Evelina it is "unjust" (199) to compare people who are fundamentally different from one another. Owing to the fact that Sir Clement alone possesses superior "address and manners" (199), she will not, for example, compare him to Mr. Smith. She will however liken *herself* to Sir Clement. Though Evelina overtly refuses Sir Clement's suggestion that they possess a similarly "frank [. . .] disposition" (49), we note that she actually makes the link she more overtly avows herself uninterested in forging. We know Evelina is aware of every key word used by the three men who judged her merits at the private ball. Lord Orville's assessment commanded her keenest interest, but she shows later in her letters a remembrance for a word—"Nobody" (320)—used by, appropriately enough, the least of the three men, by Lovel. We have reason to conclude, then, that she knew that by calling Sir Clement a "genius" (52) in a letter so soon after he used that word to describe her (40), she was herself facilitating the connection between them that Sir Clement had already begun to create. She actually makes them seem perfectly complimentary, writing in the letter, "[a]nd thus was my deviation from truth punished; and thus did this man's determined boldness conquer" (48).

Evelina calls Sir Clement her "champion" (39)—which is but fair, for though Evelina is surrounded by the base, through crowds of coarse Sir Clement still seeks her out. So doing, he does her an enormous favor; for though we might normally be prepared to understand his attentions as a threat, since her biological and physical closeness to the base put her status as "a lady" into question, his attentions reinforce her self-understanding as someone who actually has something "high" to lose. Early in her association with Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan, Evelina says "the[ir] continual wrangling and ill-breeding [. . .] made [her] [. . .] blush that [she] [. . .] belonged to them" (65). Fortunate for her, then, that Sir Clement's persistent interest in her, and lack of interest in her companions, makes it seem as if he is competing to have her all to his own. "Sir Clement takes interest in the Captain; he "stud[ies] all [his] [. . .] humours" (83)—but only so as to ensure his access to Evelina. He tells her he "pa[id] court to the gross Captain Mirvan, and the virago Madame Duval," only to "procure [for] [him]self" (381) her company. And though he comes within reach of the coarse but for her finery, the times when he fixes more squarely on them helps her out as well.

The significant example of this good service occurs when Sir Clement helps Captain Mirvan "sport" with Madame Duval. Madame Duval ends up on the ground, covered with dirt, disassembled and inarticulate, while Evelina remains unharmed, still subject to Sir Clement's keen interest. Clement detaches her from Evelina and *literally* brings

Madame Duval down to earth: he helps create a memorable moment for Evelina to use to help understand herself as *surely not at all* to be compared to her horrid grandmother.

Though in one sense Evelina was not dirtied by her involvement, in another, not so much. For though she voices her dissatisfaction with the plot, we know Evelina failed to warn Madame Duval about the danger she was in. And we have reason to believe Evelina actually enjoyed the sport, but would not admit this to herself in her letters, because when Sir Clement targets someone (a non-family member—Mr. Smith) that permits her a more open laugh, so to speak, she does not let the opportunity go by unwasted.

Evelina does not actually laugh, as it would unbecoming to do so, but she does admit that after seeing the results of his (i.e., Mr. Smith's) sudden awareness of Sir Clement's interest in her, she "could almost have laughed" (225). As before with Madame Duval, Sir Clement makes Mr. Smith decompose—"he seemed to lose at once all his happy self-sufficiency and conceit" (225). In a way, he also makes Mr. Smith physically low—"he [. . .] seemed himself, with conscious inferiority, to shrink into nothing" (225)—as well as physically distant: "[he] again retir[ed] to an humble distance" (227). Of course, Sir Clement is frequently described as someone who when he closes in on Evelina, causes her significant distress. But we notice that Evelina seems to so need being likened to Sir Clement that she risks doing so *physically*, and just after Sir Clement had discovered her in a situation that legitimizes an even more predatory

stance toward her. After listening to Mr. Smith lecture about a painting, she writes, she "saw Sir Clement bite his lips; and indeed, so did I mine" (227).

Sir Clement also helps Evelina by providing her with good reasons for reproving him; and until she meets Mr. Macartney, it is primarily through these reproofs that she keeps some claim to the lady-like—on being high, and therefore at all like Orville. But it is the fortuitous discovery of Mr. Macartney that is key for a more deeply sourced display of highborn conduct. She saves his life, an act that required courage. It make her seem great-souled, but note, not unladylike or manly, for "courage *was not* a masculine prerogative in the early modern period [read 16-18th century]" (Carolyn Williams, "Women Behaving Well," 72; emphasis added).

But though Mr. McCartney proves highly useful for her ascension, she actually achieves Lord Orville heights as much by others' shrinkage as from their boost. That is, Lord Orville lowers his standing some as the text proceeds. She portrays her involvement with both Sir Clement and Mr. Macartney as making Lord Orville jealous. He shows social unease—"he look[s] away" (369) while at a social gathering, when Evelina looked upon him—and demonstrates a further slip in social grace: "Lord Orville's reception of us was grave and cold: far from distinguishing me, as usual, by particular civilities, Lady Louise herself could not have seen me enter the room with more frigid unconcern" (372). Evelina portrays him here as de-evolving in precisely the way she feels vulnerable to, that

is, she describes him so he as well seems susceptible to being compromised by unflattering relations.

Evelina conceives of herself, then, as someone who manages what her own beloved Orville could not: she never devolves; she never allows her initial burst of laughter at Lovel's ridiculousness to make herself seem lowly or bumpkinish. Instead, she portrays herself so that she—much as an earth-bound angel might—ascends. In contrast, Werther devolves. Though he does not consider them “equal” (Goethe 28) to him, he associates with the lowly, and he plots his narrative so that he moves from being relatively happy to being a perpetually tormented person. Yet since in his imagination the heavenly can be found as much amongst the low as it can the highly placed, devolution, finding himself amongst lowlifes, the ostensible dregs, is actually his means to purity.

The sort of people Werther doesn't want to be associated with are those like Evelina—the “sensible” (61) “who devote their creative energies [. . .] to moving one place higher up a table” (77). Werther suggests that sensible types often secure for themselves the kind of security Evelina hopes marriage to Lord Orville will afford her. But he also believes that since they are interested primarily in placement and not in love, though sweetly “housed” they “will [nevertheless] be done for” (33). He relates the fate of a wealthy woman who, like Evelina, was concerned to insinuate herself within Property and barricade herself before barbarians: she had “no pleasure apart from looking down on

middle-class citizens from the heights of an upper-storey window” (76).

Werther would surely question the soundness of Evelina's assessment of Lord Orville as the best of men, for in some respects Arthur possesses similar character traits to Lord Orville's, only they aren't anywhere near so flatteringly portrayed. Admittedly, just as Evelina judges Lord Orville “the most amiable man in the world” (*Evelina* 41), Werther actually writes that Albert is “the best fellow on earth” (59). However, Werther dooms him in his own estimation by associating him with all other “sensible people” (61). In the letter in which he does so, Albert makes a declaration concerning bad behavior that is easy to imagine Lord Orville making. Albert says, “[b]ut you will grant that certain actions are wrongful [. . .] no matter what their motives” (60). Werther tries, just as Sir Clement once did with Lord Orville, to suggest that motives do in fact matter, and can and should affect our estimation of what truly is wrong, but Albert won't budge. Indeed, Werther portrays Albert as inflexible and unimaginative, someone whose coldness, someone whose fundamental belief in the rightness of his opinion, along with his desire to preach, make him worthy of mockery not praise (61). (Werther again mocks “cool, respectable gentlemen” [33] elsewhere in his letters.)

Other than Albert, most of those Werther identifies as sensible ostensibly do him a favor by treating him with disdain. For instance, he describes a doctor who “considered [his] [. . .] conduct beneath the dignity of sensible people”

(45). This assessment would be embraced by Werther, however, for he despises the “officially” dignified and finds fabulous things “close to the earth” (27). He says he prefers to associate with those most frequently accused of lacking dignity: the “rabble,” “[t]he common people” (28). Though there are exceptions—for example, the foul youth who ruin others’ moods, and the grumpy lady who cut down the walnut tree (mind you, she is one with pretensions to be respectable [94])—it is clear to Werther that common people are a rather fine lot. They have not lost their capacity to love, something the sensible have in fact done, and they possess an intrinsic awareness and (however unlearned) appreciation of the truly noble (they can’t help but love Werther). “The common people,” he says, “already know and love [him], the children in particular” (28). He is particularly apt to identify himself with children—those who are, in one sense at least, the lowest of the low. He describes his encounters with them in some detail, and in each case they are described as possessed of an inherent “harmony” (35) and soulfulness—that is, as if they share the same passion and “aliveness” he himself is ostensibly in the possession of (and draws our attention to in his letters, in part by likening himself to a child).

Since associating himself with the lowly better demonstrates his gentility, we have reason to wonder if he thinks being “interred in the cold earth” (127) would somehow show just how great he really is. Considering he conceives of Nature as something always grand and noble (if

not always beneficent), and that he longs to merge himself within its oneness, perhaps he imagines his decomposition—i.e., his decline from being healthy and happy to being despondent and depressed—as preparing him for atomic integration within it. But we note that Werther for the most part imagines himself in his after-life as, so to speak, in the clouds, alongside God. And we should suspect that Werther makes use of the low for the same reason Evelina makes use of Sir Clement: they are not to them *really* the best of people, but because barriers exist which prevent them from long-associating with those they truly want to be with, they yet remain the best at hand. Werther writes that, in death, he is bound to be by his Father’s (i.e., God’s) side, and that his Father will “comfort” (128) and value him. We know he has glimpses of this reality while counting himself amongst the living, that is, that he has for a time associated with the truly high and noble—worthy Baronesses, Counts, and Princes—and that he portrays them as prizing his presence above all others, but also that he could not for long associate himself with them in peace. Just as Evelina’s coarse relatives work against her effort to associate herself with Lord Orville, those Werther abhors succeed in frustrating his ability to stay long at court.

Both Evelina and Werther, then, are similar in that both are characterized so that they portray the kind of artfulness and cunning they pretend to abhor. They differ in that Evelina can admit to being somewhat sinister (as she essentially does when she says, without self-reproof, that “she

will take “some pleasure in cutting up” “fools and coxcombs” [326]) because there is a still-contested understanding of the duties of the genteel that legitimates and even commends their policing through ridicule (note that even Lord Orville calls Lovel a “coxcomb” [37]), while Werther needs to claim more straightforward purity to distinguish himself from sour aristocrats, those who “g[ive] [. . .] [looks] [. . .] in their [. . .] oh-so aristocratic way” (81). That is, for a time, it actually serves Evelina’s intentions to portray herself as nasty, while Werther is the one who must take care not to appear the least bit a rogue. Both of them are, however, at the very least incidentally beneficent, in that they each provide readers means to conceive of their own character flaws and current lack of placement as signs of their inherent worth. If you are regularly dismissed as ignorant and uncouth, Werther’s sure to be your guy, and if you have a tendency to make others your sport but still know, which fork, which spoon, Evelina is surely your lady. But there is no doubt that associating with either of them has its (self-consoling) benefits. No wonder many of the trod-upon but still aspiring, once did.

Works Cited

- Burney, Frances. *Evelina*. London: Penguin, 1994. Print.
 Carter, Philip. *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001. Print.
 Gordon, Scott Paul. *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

- Turner, James Grantham. *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
 Von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. London: Penguin, 1989. Print.
 Williams, Carolyn D. “Women Behaving Well: Early Modern Images of Female Courage.” *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture*. Ed. Chris Mousney. Cranbury: Associated UP, 2001. Print.

The Visible Invisible Man (March 2005)

In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the invisible man repeatedly draws our attention to how he captures the attention of discerning individuals. Supposedly, this is not the sort of attention he craves. What he really wants, he tells us, is for others to take an interest in him, but not only so to better discern if he is useful or a threat. Unfortunately, "[n]o one really wished to hear what [he] [. . .] called himself" (573). We have reason to believe, however, that the attention he does receive is exactly the sort he craves—or, rather, the sort he can enjoy and still live with. For not only does he consistently show in his account that he attends to whether or not people take "special" (301) notice of him, he shows he prefers they not interact with him in a manner that makes it difficult to at some point leave them behind.

When the invisible man drives Mr. Norton about town, he remembers an experience from his early school years that influenced him profoundly. He recalls having seen photographs of black men and women who appeared "almost

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

without individuality, a black mob," along with "striking" white people who possessed "clear [. . .] features" (39). Believing his association with the Founder's college has already provided him with some status, he obviously hopes that the distinguished white man, Mr. Norton, will reinforce his preferred sense of himself as "not just another face in the crowd." However, Mr. Norton makes him feel as he wasn't actually "seen" by him, that is, as if Mr. Norton saw "only [his] [. . .] surroundings, [him]self, or figments of [his] [. . .] imagination—indeed, everything and anything except [the invisible man]" (3). He says things *which seem* to suggest that the invisible man matters to him, that his particular identity, who he is and who he will become, is important to him. For example, Mr. Norton says that his own "fate" (44) depends upon the nature of the invisible man's progress through life. He also suggests that an intimate connection exists between the two of them—"So you see, young man, you are involved in my life quite intimately, even though you've never seen me before" (43). However, the invisible man detects something about the way they are interacting which has him doubt how much he actually does mean to him. He gauges that Mr. Norton talks to him "like someone in a book" (44) would, and if he means here that Mr. Norton is not speaking to him in a manner which suggests that specific context he is in, the specific person he is talking to, interest or affect him enough to determine his delivery, he is exactly right.

Mr. Norton likens the invisible man to a "cog" (45), and he does deal with him as if he were just another "cog in a

machine” (396). We know this in part because of how he interacts with Trueblood. Though Mr. Norton is described at first as an easy-going gentleman, we know he cannot remain thus while talking with Trueblood. Trueblood truly fascinates him, for he presents him with proof he has long been searching for: specifically, that it is possible to “survive” (51) having incest with one’s daughter. Upon discovering this, he suddenly is no longer the gentleman with the “easy, informal manner” (37), and instead becomes an impassioned, “excited” (52) man. He tends to Trueblood; he makes him comfortable, and encourages him to tell his tale. He also truly attends to him—while Trueblood tells his tale, Mr. Norton listens to him with due care.

The invisible man attempts to draw Mr. Norton’s attention several times while Trueblood is speaking, but is repeatedly ignored. Specifically, we are told that he “ignored [him] [. . .], [as he] star[ed] into Trueblood’s face” (51), that he “was listening to Trueblood so intensely he didn’t see [him]” (57), and that, after he tries once again to get his attention, “[h]e didn’t even look at [him]” (61). And the invisible man is not pleased that Trueblood is the sole focus of Mr. Norton’s attention. In fact, very likely the real reason he is so upset that Mr. Norton gave Trueblood a hundred-dollar bill is because the sum does fairly represent the considerable interest Mr. Norton took in him. Trueblood, therefore, and not the invisible man, is someone Mr. Norton had “never seen [. . .] before” (43) yet took a particular interest in.

After subsequent misadventures the invisible man fears

Mr. Norton was “angry at” (98) him. However, Mr. Norton shows again how little the invisible man affects and/or interests him by telling Mr. Bledsoe, “the boy [was not] responsible,” and that “[he] may send him away, [as] [they] [. . .] won’t need him now” (103). Unlike Mr. Norton, however, Dr. Bledsoe suspects there is something amiss in the invisible man’s account of what befell him—and rightly so, for the unusual adventure began when the invisible man “suddenly decided to turn off the highway, down a road that seemed unfamiliar” (40). Dr. Bledsoe is described as looking the invisible man “up and down” (141); he understands the invisible man as someone who has produced an “accident” of a magnitude not seen in “seventy-five years” (103); and he therefore attends to him very closely to determine how much of a threat the invisible man represents, and how best to deal with him. He also “looks [the invisible man] in the eye,” and speaks “sincere[ly]” (143) to him; and though it is possible he is simply performing here, taking care to appear sincere would also imply that he is not taking the invisible man lightly.

Dr. Bledsoe sees the invisible man as someone who could ruin his empire; and though he pretends there is little the invisible man can do to destroy him, the subsequent interest he takes in him suggests he is much more concerned about the invisible man’s potential to ruin him than he lets on. Thereafter, Dr. Bledsoe’s eyes are always on him, even if he appears interested in other things. We are informed that Dr. Bledsoe “passed without seeming to see [the invisible

man] [. . .] [but] as he reached his door he said, 'I haven't changed my mind about you, boy. And I don't intend to!'" (148). So unlike Mr. Norton, who lost what little interest he had in the invisible man as soon as they parted ways, Dr. Bledsoe remains interested all the while he remains at the Founder's college. We therefore have reason to suspect that the invisible man found Dr. Bledsoe's attention more reparative than he did punitive. And even though Dr. Bledsoe set him up to be ruined in New York, since Dr. Bledsoe's plot involves making the "most important men in the whole country" (163) aware of him, in this, yet again, he supplies means for the invisible man reason to believe himself hardly just another face in the crowd.

In the letter, Dr. Bledsoe identifies the invisible man, not as an ordinary cog, but as an extraordinarily "rare" "case" (191). And we know that the invisible man will soon be closely attended to by someone else who finds him rare and special—this time, an important white man, one of the leaders of the Brotherhood, Jack. When Jack first meets the invisible man he provides him with the sort of attendance he hoped to receive from Mr. Norton but that Trueblood received instead. Just as Mr. Norton shows urgency in his desire to hear Trueblood's tale, Jack "hurried" after the invisible man, making a "puffing, bustling effort" (285). Mr. Norton provided Trueblood with attention, and Jack gives the invisible man the same. He "watches [him] [. . .] intensely" (290), and also "flatter[s]" (288) the invisible man, saying he "ha[dn't] heard such an effective piece of eloquence

[. . .] in along time" (289). Jack admits he was looking for someone to play a role, but also that he had been "waiting for months" without finding anyone "who could do what [the invisible man] [. . .] had done" (304). And just as Mr. Norton provided Trueblood with money, we know that Jack will provide him sufficient funding for *him* now to be in possession of hundred-dollar bills, a fact he draws his and our attention to by providing Mary with one of them.

Just as Dr. Bledsoe attends to invisible man in a way Mr. Norton did not, Jack attends to the invisible man in a way that many of his Brothers *do* not. When the invisible man first meets a gathering of the Brotherhood, they barely notice him. He writes, "no one paid me any special attention. It was as though they hadn't seen me, as though I were here, and yet not here" (301). Though he will later conclude that the Brotherhood "didn't see either color or men" (508), some of them likely ignored him owing to his being black, and therefore, to them, his being indistinct by nature. We are told they assume he must know how to sing since (to them) "all coloured people sing" (312). Jack, however, knows differently; with irritation he tells his Brothers that the invisible man "*does not* sing" (312). And though the invisible man doesn't actually describe how he reacted to Jack's defence of him, since he admits that he "resented having others think that [coloured people] [. . .] were all entertainers and natural singers" (314), we should again imagine him as feeling both flattered and well attended to.

Soon the invisible man is deemed atypical by both the

community he serves and by his fellow Brothers. He becomes the “focal point of [. . .] many concentrating eyes” (336) as he speaks to crowds, a fact not lost to the editor of “a new picture magazine,” who seeks an interview with “one of [their community’s] [. . .] most successful young men” (396). Though the invisible man replies to the request by stating that he desires nothing more than to be “a cog in a machine” (396), he still agrees to the interview. As a result Brother Westrum declares he is an “individualist” (401), someone who aims to stand out from the rest of the brethren. Soon the rest of the Brotherhood—Jack, most notably—come to see him as a threat. The invisible man describes how, after providing Clifton with the “funeral of a hero” (466), they awaited in a room, ready to interrogate him. Jack, just as Dr. Bledsoe once was, is described as “studying him with his penetrating eyes” (462). To this point Jack had largely assumed the invisible man would perform the role expected of him; now, however, evidently fearing the invisible man might topple the Brotherhood, he takes a “new interest” (473) in him, and attends to him just as or even more closely than he had upon first encountering him.

Jack is infuriated with the invisible man. Just as Mr. Norton “forgot himself” when he met Trueblood, Jack is so infuriated by the invisible man’s behavior he lets up his “father[ly]” (470) guise and, greatly assisted by the loss of his false eye, becomes more easily identified as either a “Cyclopean” (474) monster or an odd barnyard animal (476). Appropriately, the invisible man finds himself disgusted by

Jack. He is in fact through with him: he understands Jack now as someone who doesn’t give a damn about human life, and wants nothing more to do with him. He declares he “would never be the same” (478), but at least in respect to the sort of attention he craves, we have reason to believe he doesn’t subsequently change all that much: for he is this purportedly forever-altered individual when he writes his account, and yet we notice just how well he still remembers and chooses to attend to instances where he is ignored or well attended to. Though he will in his imagination “merge into one single white figure” the likes of “Jack and Mr. Norton” (508), he more effectively distinguishes the two men from one another. That is, one of them—Jack—is portrayed as having taken a keen interest in him, while the other—Mr. Norton—as none at all.

By deciding to end his account with a description of how he finally succeeds in capturing Mr. Norton’s attention, he makes Mr. Norton seem an elusive prize-animal he long sought and finally bagged. It is appropriate that he decides to end both his description of his surface life and of his account with this encounter, for in the way he describes it he shows it was not insubstantial for him. The invisible man tells us that “seeing [Mr. Norton again] [. . .] made all the old life live in [him] [. . .] for an instant” (577). He “smile[s],” (577) at first, but soon regards Mr. Norton “with mixed feelings” (578). He likely remembers (if he ever really forgot: he tells us at one point, “I can neither file nor forget” [579]) Mr. Norton’s lack of attentiveness; and it may be his remembrance of it that is

behind his ultimately successful attempt to agitate, mock, and terrorize him. He asks Mr. Norton, “Don’t you know me?” and “You see me?” (578)—but of course he already knows the answers to these questions—no, he doesn’t. He revenges himself upon Mr. Norton by making him feel like a “cornered animal” (578), but he also provokes him into displaying a reaction which unambiguously shows him affected by, as fully registering, and not being able to simply presume, the invisible man’s presence. In response to the invisible man’s question, “[A]ren’t you ashamed?” Mr. Norton becomes “indignant,” is lured into exclaiming ““ASHAMED!”” (578), and hastily retreats from him.

Evidently, the invisible man is greatly affected by being ignored, but those who attend to him with some kindness also distress him, for he cannot then so readily extricate himself from them. Those who show themselves monsters, like Dr. Bledsoe and Jack, are more or less cleanly left behind. He thinks of revenging himself upon them, but having done their worst, and being mostly finished with him, it is his option if he wants to relate to them further via revenge (something he either chooses not to do [with Dr. Bledsoe], or for but a brief period of time [with Jack]). They, however, no longer pursue him. Those who have cared about him and/or he engages more intimately with, such as Sybil and Mary, however, trail him (literally so, with Sybil) as he flees through the streets of New York.

The invisible man guesses that Sybil, as with everyone else, wants to use him—in her case, to make him into her

“entertainer” (521). However, he admits she does feel “true affection” (529) toward him; and, after he pretends to have raped her and ends the “game” (523) he wants no part of, they engage in more affectionate, intimate play. She compliments his laugh, and tells him she had “never seen anyone like [him]” (525). He asks her if she is “sure” (525), but unlike the time he asked Mr. Norton the same question, the invisible man is likely asking the question in earnest, for he had up to this point described her as someone who was not “kidding nor trying to insult [him]” (517). Though he replies that “it’s good to be seen” (525), his mind is elsewhere, something she is not so drunk not to espy. She accuses him of being mostly interested in trying “to get rid of her” (525), and she’s right, he is—only this doesn’t prove such an easy thing to do. And quite possibly, what lies behind her ludicrous success in trailing him through the streets of New York is the invisible man’s desire to use the episode to dramatize his difficulty in getting her out of his head. That is, he ditches her, and as a result feels the need to in some way convey the guilt he experienced in doing so.

The invisible man knows he has reason to feel guilty: not only does he suggest that Sybil to some extent cares about him and that she can engage with him sincerely, the invisible man overtly acknowledges *he* made use of *her*. *He* is the one who made her drunk, and who enjoyed imagining the humiliation George would ostensibly experience upon seeing the message he inscribed upon her belly. In addition, he is the one who suggested they continue meeting with one another,

and he cannot convince himself that it was not within his power to do otherwise. In fact, he comes to understand the entirety of his encounter with Sybil either as something he “had [. . .] done to her” or as something he “allowed her to do” (525).

It is also likely that the invisible man felt guilty upon leaving Mary, for though he knows she also intended to use him, he is well aware that he owes her plenty for having for some time treated him with generosity. He suspects, in fact, that he was the one who hadn’t treated her fairly. Specifically, he gauges that he actually inflicted upon her the crime he is so primed to damn others for, for he involved himself with her but “had never seen her” (297). In addition, as he prepares to leave her, he tries to de-personalize their relationship, to de-humanize her, by trying to persuade himself that their relationship was nothing more than one of “landlady [to] [. . .] tenant” (322). And though she doesn’t trail after him, an object he associates with her most certainly does—namely, “Mary’s broken bank and coins” (539-40). He tries to rid himself of the bank, specifically because it would “remind [him] [. . .] of [his] [. . .] last morning at Mary’s” (320), but is unable to unload it. It seems appropriate that the package remain with him, however, for even once he has left her, and even though he fears associating with her threatens engulfment—that is, to transform his singular identity into but a component of her own (316)—he seems drawn to return to her, perhaps because he believes himself still in her debt.

Who he is really indebted to, though he isn’t capable of admitting this to himself, is Jack and the Brotherhood, for just after admitting that Mary represented a threat to his singular identity he pretends that he would have preferred to stay with her, but, alas, the Brotherhood forced a parting of ways (315). And the Brotherhood may therefore be responsible for helping him ease the “feeling of dread [he experienced owing to his awareness] that [he] [. . .] had to meet her face to face” (322). But of course, as the clinging package suggests, he is never quite successful in leaving her behind. We know, for instance, that he finishes his account by suggesting he will exit his hole and perform a “socially responsible role” (581).

Granted, it is possible that he may actually be thinking here of attempting to satisfy *both* Mary’s *and* his grandfather’s expectations of him, for though Mary’s “silent pressure” (259) to do the same surely afflicts him, his grandfather is someone who also wanted him “to keep up the good fight” (16) in pursuit of a more moral world. And most certainly, his grandfather is another person he cannot quit, even though he was someone whose advice is persistently described as having made the invisible man “fe[el] guilty and uncomfortable” “whenever things went well for [him]” (16). In the hole, he even admits to being “plagued by his deathbed advice” (574); advice given to him by his grandfather (through his father)—someone who ostensibly did not mean him harm—proves even more inextricable than Mary’s possessions prove to be (though maybe—just).

Those who come closest to seeing the invisible man in the manner he proclaims he desires, therefore, may actually end up causing him more distress than those who value him for aversive reasons. I understand, however, that no one in his account is portrayed as being uninterested in using him, but I actually believe that he in fact never wants to meet such a person, for he would be drawn to abandon him or her at some point, leaving him/her still with him as a source of intractable guilt. He would abandon him/her because his life consists of “phase[s]” (576) which have him repeatedly departing places that once meant something to him. Each phase features a locale, wherein he finds a comfortable home. He makes clear that his hole is not “damp and cold,” but rather “warm and full of light” (6); he for sometime experiences the Founder’s college as a “calm[ing],” “pleasur[able]” place, wherein he felt “sheltered” (111); and the Brotherhood provides for him both security and a “clean and neat” (332) apartment he is delighted with. In each locale his actions garner attention that distinguishes him from others. (Even in the hole he feels sure he has an audience interested enough in what he has to say to slog through five hundred plus pages of his “rav[ing]” [581].) And at some point he eventually dislodges in pursuit of a new one. (True, Dr. Bledsoe will force him out of the Founder’s college, but *he* is the one who chooses to depart for New York immediately, who feels rejuvenated once he arrives in the North [156], and who never decides to revisit the South.)

Why he patterns his life so, I cannot be sure. If I were to

hazard a guess, I would suggest he has difficulty staying with any one person or place without at some point feeling more smothered than comforted. The individuality, the sort of visibility I believe he covets, then, can be obtained when significant people within an organization deem him very different from everyone else, but also lost if he lingers around too long within one. He is therefore a visible man, and should only be thought of as invisible in that he is rarely in the same place for long. We must note, however, that he is no Rinehart, for he imagines this slippery rogue as obligated to enmesh himself in relationships and “games” (523), and the visible invisible man can’t be having any of that.

Work Cited

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
Print.

Useful Object (April 2005)

Maureen Folan, in Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, is constantly grumbling about the daily chores she performs for a mother she is rarely shown not fighting with. She dreams of being comforted by and of going away with a man, but since these dreams arose her lack of surety concerning her actual appeal to men, they actually serve to strengthen rather than loosen her ties to her mother.

However, the play argues that a man *is exactly* what she needs for her to leave her everyday life behind her. For though Maureen initially tries to make use of a strong, gentle man who enters her life—Pato—as if he were just another prop with which to wage her ongoing war with her mother, he is actually means for her to forget all about that, and begin a better life for herself.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Maureen is your typical lady-in-distress. Indeed, she is at times shown to be tyrannical; notably over her mother. However, at at least one point in the play, her domination of her mother actually

serves to strengthen her desire to be united to her. In scene two, after catching her mother in lie, Maureen makes use of her mother's "crime" to justify a commanding stance toward her. Buoyed by a sense of righteousness, she tells Mag something she "sometimes" dreams of to make herself "happy" (24). She tells Mag she dreams of being "comfort[ed]" (23) by a man while at Mag's wake. The man in her dreams also courts her, makes her an offer to join him at his place, to which she remarks, "what's stopping me now?" (24). We note, however, that another person needn't be intent on stopping her, for *she* stops the day-dream plot before it explores what it might be like to become involved with a man. She does so because the idea troubles her, for just after describing her dream to her mother she prompts a conversation clearly designed to result in both of them repeatedly agreeing that Mag will surely "hang on forever" (24).

Maureen might in this particular instance find comfort in her mother's taunt that she will be around forever, because unlike when Maureen summons her dream while "scraping the skitter out of them hens" (24), she cannot at this moment discuss her dream without feeling some of the trepidation from anticipating an opportunity to soon realize it. Maureen has just been invited by Pato to a party, a party which would involve "gallivanting with fellas" (22)—that is, the sort of event Maureen thinks of as having propelled her sisters into marriage. Therefore, she may sense that a man might very soon enter her life. We also know that Maureen is not entirely

wed to the idea that she *must* wait for her mother to die before she might leave her. In conveying her dream to her mother, she works her way to proclaiming that she might leave with a man, “[a]t [her mother’s] [. . .] bloody wake, sure! Is even sooner!” (24). But leaving her mother cannot but be terrifying for Maureen: not only is she a virgin whose one experience away from home is associated with a mental collapse, she is someone who is accustomed to and finds some self-validation in taking care of her mother.

The play directs us to understand Maureen as someone whose identity is inextricably linked to routine daily chores and household rituals. More specifically, it suggests that her purpose in life has become nothing more than making use of the objects involved in these rituals to engage in an ongoing battle with her mother. Complan and porridge are their weapons of choice; they are the primary objects used by Maureen and Mag in their ongoing dispute over who is master of whom in their household, a title neither of them has clear claim to. When Maureen caught Mag in a lie, for instance, Maureen utilized the preparation of Complan to force her mother to demonstrate her acknowledgement of her guilt by drinking it, despite her ill-stomach. But earlier we observed how Mag used the preparation of Complan to force Maureen to acknowledge her being culpable of having once seared Mag’s hand (5). And given her familiarity with this way of life, and given she knows that mastering her mother offers reliable rewards (i.e., feelings of elation and self-validation), it is not surprising that Maureen seems more comfortable

conceiving of a man that enters her life as an ideal object she can use to humiliate her mother than as someone who might lead her away from all that.

Maureen brings Pato back to her home, and he ends up staying overnight. Though they are shown flirting with one another, to be genuinely interested in one another, we suspect that Maureen brought him home primarily to triumphantly frustrate and humiliate her mother. Maureen knows her mother is disgusted by just the idea of her having sex: she “laugh[ed],” after her mother called her a “[w]hore” (23) for imagining herself enjoying being intimate with two men. Maureen now has the opportunity to experience how Mag would react to actually *seeing* her with a man she had slept with, and she will not let it slip away. She convinces Pato not to sneak out before her mother awakens, something he had intended to do, and wastes no time making use of him in the morning to antagonize her. She comes in “wearing only a bra and slip,” “goes over to Pato,” “sits across his lap,” and “kisses him at length” (39). She obviously wants her mother to believe they had had sex the night before: she says to Pato that he’ll “have to be putting that thing of [his] [. . .] in [her] [. . .] again before too long is past” (39). Maureen is of course referring to his penis here, and it is no surprise that Pato reacts to Maureen’s statement by “get[ting] up and idl[ing] around in embarrassment” (40).

Pato’s discomfort leads to his insisting he must soon be off: “I’ll have to be off now in a minute anyways. I do have packing to do I do” (40). But Mag, intent on making full use

of him, persists in relating to him in ways he finds uncomfortable. She orders him into the kitchen to “[s]mell the sink” (41). He does so, and he is described as being “disgust[ed]” (41) by the smell of Mag’s urine. But though Maureen has effectively made use of him to disturb her mother, Mag is equally facile at making use of whatever is at hand to manipulate and manage her daughter. She responds by informing Pato of Maureen’s stay in a mental hospital, and this is effective in upsetting Maureen, causing her to lose her assurance and her control, and to run over, “fists clenched” (42), to assault Mag. Pato, however, prevents her from landing blows—an act which ends his stance in this scene as a passive tool/observer. He physically intercedes between the two of them (he “steps between the two” [42] of them), and, in comforting her and reassuring her that she is not abnormal, that she is sane, makes claim to all of Maureen’s attention and interest. After Pato says, “[t]hat’s all past and behind you anyways” (44), Maureen responds by “look[ing] at him awhile” (44). In her daydream she imagined being comforted by a man, a consideration scary enough to have her follow it by strengthening her attachment to her mother. Here now, likely for the first time, she actually experiences being comforted by a man she cares about, and it proves sufficiently compelling that she replies by attending more closely rather than by backing away.

True, she does make use of her renewed intimacy with him to better sell her story that she was not the one who burned Mag, but she may do so primarily now to ensure Pato

continues to find her desirable—the first time that morning she shows this concern. She clearly begins to see Pato as someone who could assist her in leaving her current life. She “look[s] straight at him,” and asks, “[d]on’t I have to live with it?” (45). Much seems to depend on how he responds to this question, for her disposition changes abruptly when Pato responds simply by requesting she put some clothing on. She becomes “sombre again” (45), looks “down at herself” (45), and concludes that Pato had from the beginning not found her good-looking enough to excite him.

But though Pato failed to supply the reassurance she needed to brave the continuation of their courtship, the scene offers uninterrupted evidence of how much his interest in her has affected and changed her. Mag re-enters the room “waving papers,” she even “stopp[s] Pato’s approach” (46), but neither of them seem to notice her, something she is shown cognizant of in her asking, “Eh?” (46), after allowing sufficient time for them to respond to her discovery of the Difford Hall papers. But Pato “look[s] [only] at Maureen,” and Maureen will “look at her a moment” (47), but only after Pato has left her home. Maureen will again speak to Mag, but has lost all interest in combating her. After “linger[ing]” (47) over her dress, she says in “passing [to] her mother,” “Why? Why? Why do you . . .?” (47), but is not really interested in her response. Mag is left “holding [the] [. . .] papers rather dumbly” (47), and though she subsequently tries to make use of a more familiar object—her porridge—to engage her daughter’s attention (something she managed to do at the end

of scene one), the scene ends with her all alone, speaking to no one but herself.

After she concludes that Pato is not interested in her, Maureen returns to her habitual means of engaging with her mother, but Mag knows her daughter would be doing otherwise had she not intercepted Pato's letter to her. Though Maureen tries to persuade herself that she and Pato are incompatible, Mag remarks that she knows her daughter attends to her now only because he did "not invit[e] [her] [. . .] to his oul going-away do" (61). And, indeed, whereas it was once the only relationship Maureen was comfortable being involved in, their relationship now serves as compensation for the one Maureen failed to secure with him. Maureen has proven herself to be just like her sisters in that she too can lose herself in a man, and she will once again show how quickly she can forget about Mag upon learning that Pato had not in fact rejected her but actually had invited her "to go to America with him" (68). After hearing this, Maureen is described as "in a daze," as "barely noticing her" mother (even though her mother lies on the floor, "convulsing" and "screaming" [68]). And we note this scene is also one that ends with Maureen talking only to herself.

Pato ends up marrying someone else, and once Maureen is made aware of this, her fate is sealed: she will forever after be "a dried up oul" (23) bitty. While she still believed it possible she would join him in America, she aggressively removed from her kitchen shelves those objects—Complan and porridge—most clearly associated with her life with her

mother. But without a man to lead her out of her previous existence, she even more closely fuses herself to her, and all promise of her having her own life is over.

Work Cited

McDonagh, Martin. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1998. Print.

Maintaining the Peace (May 2005)

Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" is the sort of work Victorians might have turned to for reassurance. It provides the reader with a soothing, predictable space/world, wherein s/he is well prepared to encounter and process the New. There is disequilibrium in the poem: Lancelot is described as such an unusual, affecting sight that his appearance shocks the Lady of Shalott (hereafter, "Lady") into activating the curse. However, the Lady's subsequent activity is equal to and nullifies his emblazoned entrance, leaving us with an appropriate pairing: a gentle knight, amidst a newly becalmed realm.

The first stanza reassures us that throughout the poem, throughout the world it evokes, we will find ourselves well grounded in the familiar, the already known. We know that both "side[s]" (1) of the river have the same expansive "fields of barley and of rye" (2). Visual and auditory echoes of this pronouncement are found in the stanza's first line: "river" is enclosed by "*either*" on one side, and by "*lie*" on the other.

Throughout we find words within the same line which seem visually and/or audibly related. Sometimes the same word is repeated—"four" in line fifteen, for example. Sometimes we get overt, obvious assonance and/or alliteration—e.g., "surly village churls" (52). And sometimes we get visual rhymes—e.g., "weaveth steadily" (43). The result is that we do not simply progress as we read and, in effect, jettison the words already encountered in the line; rather, there is a sense that we are encouraged to read forward as we progress across a line, and backward as we reach its completion. That is, we are provided with some sense of the stable, eternal "medieval" present while we move our way through the poem.

The same sense of familiarity provided by seeing/hearing resemblances between words on single lines, is also enabled by re-encountering the same words throughout the poem. Nouns are frequently repeated, and so too many adjectives, including "little," "broad," and "bearded." The repetition of these words again reinforces the poem's stability and regularity, maintained most obviously by the repetition of the refrain, "The Lady of Shalott," which terminates most all of the poem's stanzas. There may be something very soothing, too, in discovering as we read antonyms of many previously encountered words. Without having seen "under" (102) before encountering "Over" (16), without having encountered "In" (29) before encountering "Out (114), we might have lost some of the ease the poem provides by its seeming to offer us a comprehensive spatial survey of its world.

Since we are told both what is “up and down,” and what is “left and right” (137), after being told of the “stormy east wind” (118) that emerges with the activation of the curse, we might at some level be unsettled to learn that we never hear of what lies westward. But we would be looking in the wrong direction, so to speak, if we looked to the stanzas that delineate the Lady’s subsequent transformation for the poem’s discordant element. Instead, we must look to Lancelot. And how can we not? Unlike the poem’s “two” “knights” (61) and Camelot’s “four [. . .] towers” (15), that is, unlike other “objects” in the poem associated with medieval order and even numbers, Sir Lancelot is “One” (94) singular, irregular knight.

Sir Lancelot, though a knight, is described in a manner due a monarch. He is associated with the “sun” (163): he and/or his equipment is described as “flamed” (76) and “blazoned” (87). His equipment is also likened to “stars” (84), that is, to equally endowed objects in the night-sky. But he himself is imagined as a “meteor” (98), that is, to a singular object whose appearance in the night-sky cannot but command attention away from all else. The packed stresses of “broad clear brow” (100), “war-horse trode” (101), and “coal-black curls” (104), complement the meteor simile by making him seem energized, deliberate—the opposite of easeful. Unlike all other subjects the Lady espies in her mirror, he alone is given sustained attention—the rest are given but one or two accompanying adjectives. Sustained, too, is the sequence of “b” words used to describe him, such as “bow-

shot” (73), “brazen” (76), and “blazoned” (87), which again emphasizes our understanding of him as bold, pronounced and dangerous.

The extensive description of Lancelot’s passage is followed by an equally extensive description of the Lady’s entrance into Camelot. And we note just how much the imagery involved in the Lady’s passage down the river counters that associated with Lancelot. He is associated with a sun which “blazed” (76), she with “pale yellow woods” (119). He is likened to a “meteor, trailing light” (98), she floats “down the river’s dim expanse” (127). His helmet is likened to a “flame” (94), her white clothing, to “snow” (136). In a sense, the Lady’s passage can be thought of as providing us with a “down” to his “up,” or with a “left” to his “right”—that is, with his natural complement. Lancelot and the Lady are made to seem similar opposites. Together, they are the harmony that comes when opposites unite.

The Lady’s entrance into Camelot spooks “All the knights at Camelot” (167), but Lancelot calms them down. No longer a man constituted by tightly packed energy, he instead seems easeful. This transformation is effected rhythmically, as he is no longer the man whose “war horse trode” (/ / /) but one who “mused a little space” (168) (/ ~ / ~ /). We also note that “God” and “grace” (170)—both stressed words—are used to bookend the poem’s second to last line: The poem terminates as it began, with peace throughout the land.

Work Cited

Tennyson, Alfred. "The Lady of Shalott." *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*. Eds. Thomas Collins and Vivienne Rundle. Peterborough, Broadview Press, 1999. Rundle. Peterborough, 162-65. Print.

Getting Noticed (June 2005)

In his poetry Matthew Arnold deals with abandonment in a way which struck me, at least, as un-Victorian. His speakers rage against the perpetrators; the fault is with them, not with the speakers. But Arnold settled on a different reaction to abandonment and isolation as he "matured": re-union, a desired community, he decided, *can* be created, so long as the critic/poet remains resolutely faithful and good. But fascinatingly, other poets in the Victorian era suggest through their works that they think abandoning parents are drawn mostly to acts of misbehavior, not to notable instances of right-thinking, pure intentions, or good works. Specifically, we can look to works such as Robert Browning's "Caliban Upon Setebos" and Edward Fitzgerald's "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám," for evidence that at least some notable Victorians understood that gods (and other parental figures) are most quick to attend to their flock when they spot them out in blatant acts of disobedience.

Several of Matthew Arnold's poems argue that

abandonment, a fracture of a wonderful community, is effected by willfully negligent, blameworthy others. In “The Forsaken Merman,” for example, a mother’s children desire nothing more than her return and the renewal of her attention. They are “wild with pain” (16), and try and convince themselves that “[s]urely she will come again!” (17). But the merman knows “[s]he will not come” (28), that she has decided not to—too much fun to be had indulging in surface “joy[s]” (95)! The children are in pain; the merman is both pained *and* angry. He deems his wife “cruel” for abandoning forever “[t]he kings of the sea” (144). Angry, too, is the speaker of Arnold’s poem, “To Marguerite—Continued.” The speaker of this poem rages at “[a] God” (22) who seems to have isolated him out of cruelty: “Who ordered that their longing’s fire / Should be as soon as kindled, cooled?” (19-20). But upon maturing as an essayist Arnold no longer uses his craft to rage at others’ flaws; instead, he is an ascetic who admonishes himself to question his own worth and righteousness—that is, someone who must learn to “banish from his mind all feelings of contradiction, and irritation, and impatience” (“Preface to the first edition of poems” 1278). The Arnold whose speaker in “To Marguerite” castigated such a formidable figure as God for restricting the pleasure offered to man, became the man who in his “Preface to the first Edition of Poems” praised other reified personages—the ancients—for their “severe and scrupulous self-restraint” (1276). The Arnold who granted his speaker such authority in his declamation of God, who did

not make him (i.e., the speaker) seem inappropriately ungrateful or possessed of limited intellectual reach, became the pious essayist who reifies Elders as being the only ones qualified to see things in their entirety: according to Arnold, the ancients could “regard the whole,” while he and his generation could but “regard the parts” (1273).

Arnold writes that the critic who desires a community united in contemplation of great thoughts and deeds will “at last convince even the practical man of his sincerity” (“The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” 1300) through speaking Truth rather than falsehood. Because he ultimately chose to believe that a determined, resolute effort to bring people together would attract notice, he moves away from embracing the possibility raised in “Merman” that however much one “c[alls]” (15), however “dear” (14), however right one’s voice, one will never be heard.

I am surely not alone in thinking Arnold become an advocate for “right behavior” because it helped him understand his fate as in his control, and because it permitted him to drop the disturbing consideration of God (and existence) as intrinsically brutal. His first stance was the braver one, however, but he could not sustain the more difficult worldview. For the same reason, the Robert Browning who wrote “Caliban Upon Setebos” is to be preferred over the Browning who wrote “Rabbi Ben Ezra.” “Rabbi” seems very Victorian in the way Matthew Sweet argues contemporaries (that is, ourselves) prefer to imagine the age: that is, as “religiose” and “puritanical.” We find in

this poem a mind at work that would transform any misfortune, any reason for doubting whether one is cared for or lovingly attended to by God, as an opportunity to demonstrate one's faith and good character. We sense in "Rabbi" a Browning similar to the Tennyson in "In Memoriam," the poem *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* rightly judges as one where "the poet's hard-won religious faith finally triumphs over science-induced despair" (1016). We sense someone who could not in the end handle either the consideration that God may not exist, or that he exists but may not in fact be beneficent, and so settled on an optimistic, edifying stance—that is, someone like Edmund Gosse's father, whom Gosse described as one who "took one step in the service of truth, and then [. . .] drew back in an agony, and accepted the servitude of error" (Norton 1344).

But Browning *was* capable of engaging the latter possibility in his poetry. However, he does so through a speaker—Caliban—that ensures his point of view could subsequently readily be dismissed (by him, by others) as corrupt and wrong-minded. Walter Bagehot, in "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning," characterizes Caliban as an "incongruous" (1316) mind. According to him, Caliban certainly is not someone who should be understood as espousing a point of view which is "in [Browning] [. . .] but not *peculiar*" (1310) to him, that is, a point of view universally shared by all men. *The Norton Anthology of Literature* essentially agrees with Bagehot's assessment of Browning's motives, arguing that Browning shows how "the mind of a primitive

creature may operate" (986), i.e., not how *Browning's* mind at some level operated. Though it is disappointing to discover that, even today, many critics prefer to imagine Caliban as Browning's example of a despicable manner in which to participate in and construe the world, in truth, Caliban expresses some of the same rage at a seemingly non-benign deity who cares little for his creations that the "proto-typical" Victorian Matthew Arnold expresses in his earlier poetry. Both Caliban and the speaker of "To Marguerite" look to God's craftsmanship, to his created world, to establish His character. Caliban understands that Setebos could and would have made life better for his creatures had he not desired to fashion them so they were forced by their limitations to attend to and worship him: "This blinded beast / Loves whose places flesh-meat on his nose" (181-82). The speaker of "To Marguerite" also realizes that God could have made the world without the seas that forced the separation of man from man. In both poems "God" is portrayed as a malicious entity: he does not "exercise [his craft] [. . .] / [. . .] for the love of what is worked" (188).

But Caliban would at least appreciate Arnold's concern to become more pious and ascetic as he aged. After all, while Caliban could only brave a harsh critique of his god while hidden "under holes" (267), Arnold did so through a speaker who would be taken by most to be Arnold himself. Caliban, too, when discussing what he would do if he were overheard, admits he would react by trying to "appease Him" (272) in some way. Though he imagines sacrificing parts of himself—

or the entirety of others—to do so, a move toward pious reverence would certainly be something Caliban would consider. But he wouldn't deem it a strategy which would *necessarily* appease His wrath, for Caliban knows God to despise most especially those who think they have him figured out: "Repeat what act has pleased. He may grow wroth" (224). According to Caliban, finding means to avoid or appease God is a difficult task. It is in fact life's primary "sport: discover how or die!" (218).

There is a sense in "Caliban," however, that being good *is* means to escape His wrath, for the poem ends with Setebos' vengeance being visited upon him for airing disrespectful thoughts. However, we should note that if Caliban's primary irritation with God was His lack of interest in him (and it might well be: we note that he is well aware of how Setebos "favours Prosper, who knows why?" [203]), unconsciously he might have hoped to be overheard so to obtain much desired attention. Like a deprived child comes to sense as he acts up as if spoiled, he may have come to know that being thought of in anger is to be preferred over not being thought of at all.

One wonders if some Victorian poets wrote in hopes of inviting upon themselves the wrath and disapproval of their society's social censors. In Edward Fitzgerald's "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám," the speaker presents a creator who may not be malicious but who cannot be impressed by any one human soul. He proclaims that "[t]he Eternal Sáki from the Bowl has poured / Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour" (184)

more. The personified world "heeds" "our Coming and Departure" / "As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast" (187-88). He capitalizes "Coming" and "Departure" to convey our own preferred sense that our presence in the world mean something, that it *should* mean something, to He who begat it. But though Fitzgerald portrays God as insensitive to small disturbances, there is a sense in the poem, as there is in "Caliban," that *blaspheme* can be counted upon to draw the attention and ire of gods. Caliban's God (Setebos) is forever on the lookout for those who would either dare critique Him or "who seem too happy" (258). And just as a raven, an agent of Setebos, of God, appears immediately after Caliban registers his compliants, in "Rubáiyát" "[t]he little Moon looked in that all were seeking" (357) "while the Vessels one by one were speaking" (356). (Note: In reference to the moon, Fitzgerald writes: "[a]t the close of the Fasting Month, Ramazán . . . the first Glimpse of the new Moon . . . is looked for with the utmost Anxiety" [*Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry* 155].) There is a sense in both poems, then, that the best means to attract notice is to be bad. We note that the speaker in "Rubáiyát" articulates his preference to be visited upon by God, under any circumstance, than to remain alone:

And this I know: whether the one True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath—consume me quite.

One Flash of It within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright. (305-

09)

Fitzgerald attracted intense irate attention through making known his belief that we should praise, not fear, “the grape” (361)—the indulgent life—for we know that Browning composed “Rabbi Ben Ezra” in order to refute Fitzgerald’s speaker’s point of view. Perhaps, too, poets such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti unconsciously wrote their sensuous verse hoping to attract the attention of a parental censor. If the speaker of “Jenny” is meant to represent Rossetti, he certainly felt guilt-ridden and shameful, and anticipated a moment of ultimate “[j]udgement” (218). Maybe Rossetti wrote a poem in which he admits to sharing the prostitute’s sinfulness (“And must I mock you to the last, / Ashamed of my own shame” [383-84]), hoping he would be punished for not sufficiently “reck[ing] [God’s] [. . .] rod” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur” 4). It might seem strange to suggest Rossetti wrote some of his verse actually *hoping* to provoke the sort of angry, mean-spirited attack he ended up receiving by critics like Robert Buchanan, but as Julia Saville argues in *A Queer Chivalry*, “literal flagellation in the nineteenth century earned the designation ‘the English vice’” (153). Punishment, according to Saville, brings pleasure to the masochist, because it draws out a “realization [of a desired] [. . .] union” (156)—that is, because it serves as clear evidence that one is desired by, still matters to, still very much needed parental figures.

Though the Victorian age is typically thought of as one

that had to come to terms with how God and the natural world were being pushed further and further apart, we note that a good many of its poets still preferred to imagine the world’s unpleasantness as being effected—whether for good or ill—by an intending Other (i.e., God). Because they insisted on believing He was still “out there,” however distant, to breach back into intimacy, they enabled their hope they might secure His attendance if they behaved in just the right way. Some, such as Arnold, followed the prescribed path for notable artisans, the one English poets as far back as Chaucer followed, in either trying to produce pious work later in their life or distancing themselves from work they did in their youth. Many others, however, decided the best way to catch His eye was to live a life that was sure to earn the intolerant Censor’s lash.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H., et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Literature*. Rev. ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1968. Print.
- Arnold, Matthew. “Preface to First Edition of *Poems*.” *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*. Eds. Thomas Collins and Vivienne Rundle. Peterborough, Broadview, 1999. 1270-78. Print.
- . “The Forsaken Merman.” *Broadview*. 697-99.
- . “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” *Broadview*. 1291-1307.
- . “To Marguerite—Continued.” *Broadview*. 699-700.
- Bagehot, Walter. “Wordsworth, Tennyson, and

Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry." *Broadview*. 1308-19.

Browning, Robert. "Caliban Upon Setebos." *Broadview*. 414-18.

Browning, Robert. "Rabbi Ben Ezra." *Broadview*. 410-13.

Fitzgerald, Edward. "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám." *Broadview*. 147-55.

Henderson, Heather and Sharpe, William, eds. *The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Volume 2B: The Victorian Age*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 2003. Print.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. "God's Grandeur." *Broadview*. 1047. Print.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. "Jenny." *Broadview*. 809-15. Print.

Saville, Julia. *A Queer Chivalry: The Homoerotic Ascetism of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: UP of Virginia, 2000. Print.

Sweet, Matthew. "We Were Very Amused." 2005. Print.

Tennyson, Alfred. "In Memoriam." *Broadview*. 204-53. Print.

Critical Introduction (October 2005)

Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* is exciting to many who study Canadian literature. As we read criticism of the work, again and again we encounter critics who make use of their essays to announce their delight in knowing of at least one Canadian writer who wrote something which can unapologetically be called modernist. This is the broad significance of the work: apparently, its merits are so obvious that it announces, beams like a bat-signal to all interested that Canada *did* manage to produce a work of fiction between the two wars that not only is not an embarrassment, but which might well be a modernist masterpiece. Without it, it sometimes seems, critics of Canadian literature would have evident reason to study Victorian Canadian fiction—that is, fiction written by Canadians during the Victorian era (because nothing more could have been expected of them)—and of course our bounty of postmodern literature, but would not have much justification for studying literature “between the gaps” (which really could and should have been so much more.) By *itself*, that is, it seems to justify further explorations

into the literature written in Canada between the wars (for, for such a work to exist, presumably there must have been something very worthwhile about the Canadian milieu, as well, during this time period).

What makes it a modernist work? To begin with, since it hasn't much been commented upon, its aristocratic tone. Our narrator, Mrs. Bentley, views much about her with disdain. She shares an attitude—a particularly modern, modernist attitude—that the unsophisticated plebs about her aren't capable of understanding either her or her husband. Her disdain even makes it difficult to designate the book as regional literature, for it can be difficult to resist agreeing with her (indeed, some critics seem to be in love with her—e.g., Robert Kroetsch) that the particularities of those about her, of those who populate her immediate Horizon, aren't much worth delineating or understanding at all.

The natural environment *is* worthy of her attention, however. And it is a ravaging environment, of the type so common in Canadian literature. But her descriptions of it tells us more about her than about her surroundings. And it is clear that Ross is mostly interested in her, in how she experiences the world, how she shapes the world about her to suit her needs—and it is also clear that she describes her surroundings to suit her purposes. The elements are more than brutal: they are, *conveniently*, primeval, fundamentally opposite the human community she so loathes. The elements seem at times her allies, but the house she lives in wars against her. She thinks it hates her as she hates it, and it does,

in a way—for those who built it, who previously inhabited it, would have been the type to despise her had they been privy to her innermost thoughts. Her descriptions of the house are, therefore, in a sophisticated way, quite realistic, however surreal. They register both her and Ross's superior awareness of what it is like to be in an environment, contrived by people very unlike yourself.

Numerous critics have noted that *Me and My House* challenges the straightforward conception of time as linear. They argue that the book, indeed, ostensibly like life itself, is essentially plotless, with each day the same as any other. I'm not sure about this myself, however. What I sense in the seeming sameness of the everyday goings-on, in the repetition, is Ross's keen awareness of psychoanalysis—particularly of masochism. The ending which disappoints many critics, that is, the happy ending that seems to them so false given all that preceded it, is in fact very appropriate if we, like Ross, understand just how the masochist's mind works. The masochist does not believe that happiness is something he or she deserves. It can be made claim to—but only after much suffering. The novel shows us this process at work. Much suffering, much failing afflicts the Bentleys. This *accumulation* amounts to a kind of progression, however. That is, repetition, the losses the Bentley's suffer—of their adopted son, of their dog, for instance—is not stasis. It is instead expansion, which the Bentley's are well aware of, and which will at some point amass sufficiently to warrant their emerging from the Horizon wasteland. Eventually, after

enough suffering, the masochist feels he or she has earned respite.

Ross is very aware of psychoanalytic theory. The encounters between the Bentleys register his own awareness of the sadism and masochism in married life. My own interest is in object-relations psychoanalysis, and Ross also seems to have an intuitive appreciation of the sort of conclusions object-relations theorists have come to regarding human behavior. Mrs. Bentley registers throughout her entries her husband's resistance to being held captive. He seems both attracted to and repelled by his wife. Object-relations theory suggests that we relate to our partners as we once related to our mothers. We desire to be close to them, but at the same time fear losing our sense of selves as separate individuals while in their proximity. Mrs. Bentley's opinion, which some feminists might identify as Ross's sexist assessment of women's needs, that she needs for her husband to be stronger than she herself is, to be able to resist her, is also not a surprise to those familiar with object-relations theory, for this theory holds (at least according to one of its foremost theorists, Margaret Mahler) that women, more than men, have difficulties separating themselves from their (after all) same-sexed mothers, and in fact seek out strong men to assist them in this. Latched on to such men, they feel less likely to become overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness, of being forever trapped within the maternal matrix. In short, if we are being offered sexist fair in this modernist novel, it is at the very least reasonably updated and sophisticated—*modern*—

sexist fair.

Work Cited

Ross, Sinclair. *As For Me and My House*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989. Print.

A Good Place for a Pump and a Dump (December 2005)

The critic Norman Holland believes that a literary work is something we turn to in order satisfy “rather unsavory wish[es]” (104), without alarming our conscious ego or superego censors. We might expect such a viewpoint from a critic heavily influenced by psychoanalytic thought, and it is one I will use as the basis of my exploration of Bertram Brooker’s *Think of the Earth*. I contend that for certain readers this book can serve as a fueling site, a place where oral needs for attendance and love are satisfied, and also as a dumping site, a place where undesired aspects of oneself can, if only temporarily, be expunged from one’s system.

Freudians, who understand everyone’s psyche as similarly structured—id, ego, and superego—still of course accept that human beings are not then a homogenous lot. They would *of course* acknowledge that some texts better serve a particular reader’s therapeutic needs than others would. And who might best make use of *Think of the Earth*? The reader would have to be one who could readily imagine

himself akin to Tavistock, for in order to make best use of this book a reader must be able to use him as a proxy. So most certainly he will be male, and very likely, college educated—someone who possesses a liberal education and/or is familiar with at least some of the Great Books. This person will be in his twenties and thirties, that is, just beyond the age where excessive periods of pensive contemplation is only to be expected and maybe even appropriate, and who is (or at least feels that he is) beset by members of an older generation asking him what he’s going to do with his life. And, most importantly, this person (hereafter: “ideal reader”) will have a substantial need for self-validation.

If you can imagine oneself as Tavistock, you can for the duration of the book situate yourself amongst a provincial, primitive surround, possessed of admirable “sunsets” (81) but absent anyone who might draw or write about them at all well. So *why* on earth would you want that? The sad answer is because the ideal reader of this book is not only unsatisfied, he is insecure, and therefore couldn’t bear it if for the duration of the book Tavistock was placed amongst those equally gifted young men the Canon was once familiar with (during his College years). Situated in this particular setting, however, the ideal reader is well placed to easily imagine himself affecting people in the same way we are told the sudden sight of an unusual tree had upon those who had never see its like before: that is, as if hereto they had never before known anything “tall, [anything] [. . .] that soars, [anything] [. . .] mysterious” (80).

These provincials not only contrast very nicely with Tavistock, they also recognize and appreciate his ostensible substantial depth and greatness, his real humanity. Gregory, the foreman, for instance, had many discussions with Webb concerning Tavistock, and came to conclude that though “[h]e’s high and mighty, [. . .] “there[’s] [. . .] [also] something gosh-awful human” (28) about him. Fetterly, the lawyer, we are told, “looked at Tavistock as though he suspected him of being out of his mind, but in the burning eyes there was a light of compassion so contagious that his manner immediately softened” (45). Gawthorpe, the editor of the *Monitor*, decides that “[t]here is a queer kind of magnetism about him [Tavistock], even in repose” (124), and eventually that “[h]e had never felt such sympathy for anybody in his life,” that “[h]e is a wonderful fellow,” that he’d never met such a fellow” (127).

Each one of these men should be counted amongst the town’s most respected citizens, and the text attends far more closely to their reactions to Tavistock than to anyone else’s. Indeed, the two most respected men in town, the Canon and Dr. Bundy—two men who cannot walk public streets without “[p]eople hush[ing] their chatter as they went by, ready to nod or speak if either of them should glance their way” (13)—judge Tavistock a profound, deep-feeling, sensitive man. The Canon is also awed by Tavistock’s vitality. The doctor, thought by many to be Tavistock’s intellectual equal, does not react reverantly to him until the very end of the text, but he does do so. With all the textual attention to how people come

to respect Tavistock, the ideal reader cannot be one who really wants to detach himself from society. He might, like Goethe’s young Werther, slip further into his inner self, or link himself to celestial and/or literary patriarchal orders; but his greatest wish is to be brought down to earth and count himself amongst an earthly one. But he would want this only when the time is right, specifically, only when the text makes clear that most work is just busy acquisitiveness, and only after the notable elder townsmen consider him more someone to be respected than someone who hasn’t yet amounted to much.

We note that these men respect Tavistock, not simply owing to his intensity and profundity but because they sense in him a profoundly generous, selfless nature. They assess him as someone who is sensitive to other people’s pains, and who intends to do all he can to do away with as much of it as possible. Basic and base desires, held by most, have no hold on him: he is quite willing to divest himself of his family fortune if it might help Linklater’s grandchildren. He is the perfect person for the ideal reader to identify with, for the ideal reader, despite his immense need for attention, cannot admit to the enormity of this need, cannot admit to using the text to satisfy this need, without thereby arousing the disapproving attention of his super-ego—always alert, as it is, to press down with guilt the rising of any such deeply felt need to indulge. The text enables him to think of himself as selfless—as Tavistock—while all the while actually satisfying his need for worship-like interest and attention.

Tavistock *does*, however, admit to feelings of egotism. He admits to himself that, concerning the great act he would do for humanity, he “had looked past the act to its consequences,” that he had enjoyed imagining himself “a man whose life and death would be looked back to by countless generations” (248). But this comes at the end of the text, that is, *after* his ability to attend to those in need has already been demonstrated and/or referred to, and just *before* the omniscient narrator informs the reader of how Tavistock had divested himself of all egotistical motivations. But he still admits to being needy. Would this admittance arouse the ideal reader’s punitive superego? Likely not. For even if Tavistock’s owning-up to selfish needs might draw the ideal reader to attend to and reflect upon his own neediness, upon how his own needs are being satisfied, quite possibly, at this point of the text, the reader feels absent any desire in need of a punitive hemming-in.

Tavistock’s ostensible goal is to wipe the world clean of its guilt; the text provides means for the ideal reader to be cleansed of any he felt loaded down with. It accomplishes this by providing him with another proxy, one he can use to dump all aspects of himself he would be rid of—Harry. Both Tavistock and Harry are likened to one another, which makes it easy for the reader to split off all his good qualities into Tavistock and all his bad into Harry. Both are charismatic. Both are familiar with the arts (a rarity in that part of the world). Both have “been places,” and are the subject of Laura’s keen interest. And both are in fact initially assessed in

the very same fashion—as high and mighty. But the key difference between them is that while Tavistock’s ostensible real depth and worth eventually becomes apparent to those who get to know him, those who get to know Harry come to think of him as a superficial jerk.

So though Tavistock contends there is no such thing as good and evil, the text actually encourages this binary: there is Good—Tavistock, absent of all id desires—and also Evil—Harry, in possession of nothing else. The reader can identify with Tavistock and enjoy, with the disposal of their now pollutant-filled proxy, feeling delightfully absent of sin.

If the ideal reader is someone who wants to feel clean and virtuous, one should ask if Tavistock’s intention to murder someone (even if to effect greater good) means rather fewer of them exist to take advantage of the book than I’ve made seem the case. In my judgment, however, ideal readers might still not mind identifying with Tavistock, despite his murderous intent, for they would understand his desire to murder as a risky but still necessary means to address their proxy’s gentleness, which could readily be mistaken for insufficient manliness, for impotence. Tavistock conveys the ideal reader’s concern that he needs to do more with his life, that he needs to act more and think less. And, given that the reader must attend to others’ appraisals of their proxy as “nurse[-like]” (29) and “womanish” (30), given that he must endure having not just hapless Pitt but manly Ruff, the Russian revolutionary, think him too gentle to harm anyone, he is no doubt pleased that everyone who thought they knew

him, including Pitt and Ruff, come to believe him fully capable of murder.

But though the ideal reader wants to be thought of as a man, this isn't to say he's averse to being associated with strong women. Tavistock admits at one point that his purpose in life had been profoundly moved by his mother's lineage, that "his long held idea belonged to the cold Maunders, after all" (208). And it is through drawing on his *mother's* influence, upon her cold but potent strength, that he feels empowered to "confront Death and 'stare him out'" (208), "to face the idea of murder—in cold blood" (255). To chill his blood to murder, he might be drawing on Clara's strength as well—on her "cold vehemence," which he admits "could chill his blood even now" (38). Since he admits there is "truth" behind Clara's assertion that "a man who cannot kill is only half a man" (255), and that he was surprised by her preference of Pitt over himself, we know that Tavistock wants to be thought capable of murder so he can make claim to her full respect.

With their being portrayed as cold and powerful, as haunting, determining, and empowering Tavistock's present purpose, Tavistock's mother and Clara are described in such a similar manner we should take them as being the same thing, both mother-figures, this is, with Clara simply being a duplicate, a proxy, of his mother, manifested in his early adulthood. The needy ideal reader would be someone denied the love he needed from a mother incapable of well attending to him—the primary source of his long-lingering need for

attention. This mother wouldn't have attended to his needs because she needed him to satisfy her own, and when he moved apart, he experienced his mother's anger and dissatisfaction, i.e., "the cold vehemence" of her nature. He is drawn to obtain her respect and love, but also to associate himself with her strength, so he can see himself as capable of defending himself against her sadism, something not sufficiently well accomplished by running away or by associating himself with biblical, literary, or earthly patriarchies.

The ideal reader would have to be one, then, who though he seeks to establish himself amongst a patriarchal order, most certainly doesn't mind keeping some links to a matriarchal one. He would also have to be one who could bear having *a woman* almost be responsible for the action his proxy believes will accomplish his great gift to mankind—that is, he would have to be one who doesn't mind that the text plays with having *Laura* be the one who performs the miracle of committing murder while remaining sinless. The ideal reader would not be troubled by this, however, and in fact would be delighted by it. For, however briefly, Laura is likened to the reader's (and Tavistock's) cold mother, and Harry inflicts upon her the one action the ideal reader's superego cannot see effected without also needing to see crushed: namely, he is allowed to rage at her for her lack of warmth—for her not adequately attending to his needs.

Laura is accused by Harry of being "grudging and cold" (199), a crime Harry intends to punish her for: "You will

listen to me. [. . .] You're out here and you're gong to stay out here till you've heard what I've got to say" (199-200). And though Laura is elsewhere in the text described as gentle and attendant, we note that just before we learn of Harry accosting her, she, like Tavistock's mother, like Clara, is also described as being able to control others through her coldness—specifically, through the coldness of her tone (198). Moreover, just pages afterwards, the text helps establish the link between Laura and Tavistock's mother by having Tavistock dream of "his mother's face—and Laura's—[. . .] [being] queerly mixed in his dreams" (206).

Since we are told his "words rang again in her ears," and that, though she managed to block out some of what he had to say, she couldn't "banish" (200) the image of him from her mind, Harry *gets to* Laura—he rattles her. And then he dies—no doubt to the delight of the ideal reader: for Harry expressed the rage the ideal reader has for his own unattending mother *at* this mother-substitute, and the expected punishment is met out to *him*, not to the reader. And perhaps, with his rage expressed, the ideal reader may share Tavistock's ability to subsequently bring to mind all the vile qualities of another of the text's mother-figures—Clara—with tolerance and acceptance (250).

For some, then, *Think of the Earth* offers considerable satisfactions. But given that few are acquainted with thinking of literature as a place we visit to satisfy oral needs and sadistic desires, those who would prefer others read this now neglected Governor General Award-winning book would

probably be better served to direct potential readers to its other notable qualities. They might argue that it is to be admired for its modernist spirit, that through Tavistock's vital soul-searching, through his search for a deeper, perhaps more mythic way of being, it amounts to a challenge to Canadian realism and mundane Canadian respectability. Yet even with its perhaps atypical endorsement of the rebellious modernist spirit, the text's argument that you ought to think of others before you think of yourself is hardly foreign to the average Canadian. Foreign would be the argument I have been advancing, that the preference for modesty and selflessness always goes hand in hand with intentional neglect, with the designation of certain human beings as pollution-filled refuse to be dumped from sight.

Works Cited

- Brooker, Bertram. *Think of the Earth*. Toronto, Brown Bear, 2000. Print.
- Cantor, Norman. *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*. New York: Harper, 1997. Print.
- Holland, Norman. *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. New York: Basic Books, 1959. Print.
- Rheingold, Joseph. *Mother, Anxiety and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967. Print.

Consolidating Gains (December 2005)

Jahan Ramazani, in *Poetry of Mourning*, argues that we have great need of elegies. “[We] need them because people die around us every day,” and we are powerless to do anything about this as “neither science nor technology can fix death, reverse loss, or cure bereavement” (ix). However, Ramazani may underestimate what we are capable of doing with technology, for we make use a certain kind of technology—our narratives—to make us feel less susceptible to death. Indeed, we may ask even more of them—and for an opposite purpose. Particularly in his mother-son poems, Stanley Kunitz for instance uses poetry to consolidate himself to his life’s gains, making it for him foremost an instrument of acquisition, and perhaps never truly of defense or repair. Even true for his many elegies, that is, his poems are much more about the better claiming of still-available riches than they are about recovering from what’s been lost to him.

Especially when he was young, Kunitz feared his hold on life was not secure. In an interview with Leslie Kelen in

American Poetry Review, Kunitz says that as a young man he hoped to find a “language that saves,” which would help him from feeling vulnerable to “[t]he destruction of the self, the loss of identity, becoming nameless” (52). He feared losing his own autonomous identity, which had been hard-won, for life had shown him that it is very difficult to move beyond one’s roots. He refers to the terminating poem of *Intellectual Things*—a book he originally planned to title, *Against Destruction* (52)—and, after quoting select parts of it, says, “The young man whose voice I hear in that poem is telling me of his discontent and his determination to change his circumstances and himself. He knows that he must test his resolve in the crucible of experience. At the same time he realizes that he cannot escape from his sources: in his end is his beginning” (52). The beginning from which Kunitz emerged was a household ruled by an especially “dominant” (51), dominating mother—someone who had “lost [the] [. . .] capacity [to demonstrate affection] [. . .] through all the tragic circumstances of her life” (54). And if we attend both to what object-relations theory has to say about the lifelong effects of having had parents who were denied affection, and to his poems (note, not just to his “mother-son” poems), we have basis for concluding that many of them restage early experiences where attempts to detach himself from his mother lead to his becoming familiar with, and being strongly cowed by, the threat of annihilation.

Unlike conventional Freudian psychoanalysis, which holds that the boy fears his father will castrate him unless he

desists in his claim upon the mother, its branch, object-relations, understands children as first coming to know the threat of bodily mutilation, of parental sadism, through experiences with their *mothers*, the primary object one relates with that. And unlike Freudian theory, where growth, emergence from the maternal fold, is something the child, though he does not desire it, finds easy to manage, as it is a path the father encourages for it being a detour away from his own claims, object-relations theory is more likely to posit that growth, separation from the mother, is often very difficult for the child to achieve. For as Lloyd DeMause explains,

[I]mmature mothers and fathers [that is, mothers and fathers who themselves were not reacted to warmly, affectionately by their own parents] expect their child to give them the love they missed when they were children, and therefore experience the child's independence as rejection. Mothers in particular have had extremely traumatic developmental histories throughout history; one cannot severely neglect and abuse little girls and expect them to magically turn into good mothers when they grow up. [. . .] The moment the infant needs something or turns away from her to explore the world, it triggers her own memories of maternal rejection. When the infant cries, the immature mother hears her mother, her father, her siblings, and her spouse screaming at her. She then "accuses the infant of being unaffectionate,

unrewarding and selfish . . . as not interested in me" [Brazelton and Cramer 11]. All growth and individuation by the child is therefore experienced as rejection. "When the mother cannot tolerate the child's being a separate person with her own personality and needs, and demands instead that the child mirror her, separation becomes heavily tinged with basic terror for the child" [255]. (151)

Kunitz rarely overtly wrote about his relationship with his mother until later on in life (his early family poems were father-son poems), until after she died. It would seem appropriate to consider them elegies, then, but the difficulty in doing so is that it is difficult to understand them as registering any mourning. Nor should they have, for Kunitz says that the death of his mother and sisters was empowering: "The disappearance of my family liberated me. It gave me a sense that I was the only survivor and if the experiences of my life [. . .] were to be told, it was within my power to do so" (qtd. in Keillor). And many of his mother-son poems portray their relationship so that her disappearance would be cause for jubilation, for they consistently show her as someone whose own tragic life experiences made her incapable of tolerating his own desire for independence and attendance.

Peter Sacks suggests that many elegies, through the "sacrifice or mimed death of the personification of nature," function to "reverse [man's] [. . .] passive relation to the

mother or matrix" (21). "My Mother's Pears," if it is an elegy to his mother, would have to be considered an unorthodox one then, for it is one in which the Mother and her matrix exert *their* dominance over Kunitz. It is one of many of Kunitz' mother-son poems which begin with him enjoying some object, some activity, outside his mother's influence. This poem begins with a gift being presented to him by "strangers" (*The Collected Poems* 13). And what a gift! He writes that a "nest" (7) of "[p]lump, green-gold Worcester's pride" (1) pears were "deposit[ed] at *my* [i.e., his] door" (6; emphasis added). He prefers to believe the gifts were for him, that he was the intended recipient, not just of their pears but of the warm intent, the "kindness" (14), that moved the strangers to give them to him, but his mother intrudes to correct him in this.

Kunitz introduces her so that she seems either a natural complement to or a rival of the strangers. The tercet—"Those stranger are my friends / whose kindness blesses the house / my mother built at the edge of town" (13-15)—in effect has the house (and Kunitz, since the blessings occurred at "my [i.e., his] door") sandwiched between the two influences. They "bless," the mother "builds": these influences could work in tandem, except the poem makes the comparison simply to show how different they are from one another. "Build" is singular, no nonsense. It might suggest pride, but not play. The blessing strangers built an abode too—they put together the "crinkled nest" of pears—but the work involved seems pleasant. The pears were "hand-picked

and polished and packed" (5). We sense craftsmanship and communal effort; and with the alliteration, with similar but pleasantly variant ("tic, tac, toe") words, we sense play. Even "transport[ing]" them might have been pleasant, for they were "transported through autumn skies" (2), at "harvest time" (12). Moreover, since the work was pleasant, and since, though "[a] smaller than usual crop / [,] [they] [. . .] still had enough to share with [him]" (11-12)—that is, since they didn't deprive themselves in order to provision Kunitz, their gifts do not invite guilt or obligation. How different from his mother's gifts, then, for they lead to household disrepair and personal destitution. We are told that she "marr[ie]d again" (19), "for her children's sake" (18), and that this would lead to a home where "windows would grow dark / and the velvet drapes [would] come down" (20-21). Since the poem has already associated the essence of an object with the state of mind involved in crafting and delivering it—proud pears are provided kindly—the foreclosed house is a metaphor for her own withdrawnness. The mother, then, is quickly established, not just as someone who would oppose their influence, but as the one clearly in need of their benefaction. Her "*dark*" home should have welcomed in the gift of "polished" "pears," with their "bright lea[ves]" (9). The "velvet drapes [which] [came] [. . .] down" require the same sort of attendance as the pears received, which were carefully "picked and polished and packed." And yet there was her son, pretending they were his rightful property—that they had come to "[*his*] door."

He is made to seem an interloper. His interception is

made to seem a transgression worthy of punishment, and one is handed out. He is set to work—hard work. He finds himself “knee-deep in dirt / with a shovel in his hand” (24-25). The gift-giving strangers have been banished from the poem. Further punishment?—quite possibly. For in the following tercet—and as if he is not now to be receiving visitors—the mother is overtly shown sending away those who “appear on the scene” (28) without their being there at her bequest. Of course, the “visitors are his “sisters” (28), not “strangers,” but the alliterative resemblance between the two sorts of visitors is marked, and so too the poem’s portrayal of them—especially in comparison to how the poem portrays the mother. The strangers were kind, the sisters, fun: “they skip out of our sight / in their matching middy blouses” (32-33). We note the alliterative play here too, and it reminds us of how the pears were prepared. The mother, however, is a no-nonsense commander: though her “glasses [may] glint” (24), there is no play in the manner in which she is described. “Mother has wrapped a kerchief round her head” (26), and this commander “waves them [i.e., his sisters] back into the house” (30). She waves them away so that they can “fetch [. . .] pails of water” (31); but since we learn of the real cause for their dismissal only at the beginning of the next verse unit, the poem’s eleventh tercet—that is, given the severe indentation of each of this poem’s tercet’s terminating lines, a ways off—we are left to conclude that their unexpected entrance amounted to a considerable offense.

The poem ends with alliteration, but not with alliterative

play. There is nothing fun about the lines, ““Make room / for the roots!’ my mother cries, / ‘Dig the hole deeper”” (37-39), when we know Kunitz is already “knee-deep in dirt.” She is directing him to plant a tree on her property—a pear tree. No further need for strangers’ pears: henceforth he will be eating *his mother’s* pears. He is participating in his being further constrained within the “orbit created by his mother’s gravitational power” (Orr 9): he is here, digging his own grave. And it is significant that the poem terminates with him associated more with roots than with pears—pears, after all, are expected to fall from pear trees—for since this tree is associated with the mother, the poem ends with him being linked to the tree’s sustenance, not its extensions. The poem finishes with him being likened *to her*, with him mirroring her. The terminating tercet, which begins with “It is taller than I” (37), is followed by these two commands of his mother’s, where as well the same consonants are used to begin and end each of them.

Kunitz finds himself rooted in the earth at the end of “My Mother’s Pears,” and his freedom to move as he pleases is also lost to him by the end of another mother-son poem, “The Testing Tree.” In this poem he is actually shown enjoying two things in particular—his mobility (freedom) and his precious “perfect stones” (7). His enjoyment of the former is the subject of the poem’s first section. As in “My Mother’s Pears,” alliteration is used to convey the pleasure and play of action:

then sprinted lickety-
split on my magic Keds
from a crouching start,
scarcely touching the ground
with my flying skin
as I poured it on (10-15)

The capital “k” “Keds” stand out in these lines—an object enables, helps generate his speedy flight. He slows to a “walk” (55), but not owing to the difficulties a different object—a “bend,” which would end his fun by “loop[ing] [him] [. . .] home” (25)—presents him with, but because he is preparing to participate in a great game which requires he stay calm and in control. So he “walked, deliberate / on to the clearing / with the stones in [his] [. . .] pocket” (55-57). And there we are told:

In the haze of afternoon,
While the air flowed saffron,
I played me game for keeps—
for love, for poetry,
and for eternal life—
after the trials of summer. (73-78)

Pairs pale in comparison; it is indeed difficult to imagine a greater bounty. And so it is no surprise that to assist him in winning it, he asks for help—that he asks his father to “bless [his] [. . .] good right arm” (72). We don’t know if his father

obliged, but we do know that, just like after he received kindness from strangers in “My Mother’s Pears,” once again his mother intrudes.

He has been avoiding home. He has sought out and found environments where there was “no one no where to deny” his play (19-20). And so, in apparent response, his mother, his “home,” *come to him*—and do far worse than just tame him. The previous three sections attended to his will and prowess, the fourth attends to and features his mother’s:

In my recurring dream
my mother stands
in her bridal gown
under the burning lilac
with Bernard Shaw and Bertie
Russell kissing her hands (79-84)

This sentence is made to seem a response to the one which terminated the third section, which also began with “In my.” The details in these two particular tercets respond to the details in the previous section—his mother’s will loops back around his own: she checks, opposes her son. While he “stood in the shadow” (61) [. . .] “of the inexhaustible oak” (63), she “stands” “under the burning lilac.” He desires love, poetry, and eternal life, and she makes claim to all three. He desires poetry; she is associated with the burning lilac—fiery desire and flowered poesy are hers already. He seeks eternal life; she, with her “owl’s face” (86), who “makes barking

noises" (87), already seems a grotesque of ancient myth and Jung. He wanted love; she has Shaw and Russell kissing her hands, kissing from out of her hands. That is, though she stands in her "bridal gown," two men other than her husband attend to her. And owing to her son already having claim her husband's attention, we are left to wonder if his [Kunitz'] action is responsible for her being attended to by these wrong men.

That is, in this mother-son poem as well, we are lead to associate the narrative turn of what had hitherto been a poem about play and enjoyment, not just with his mother's appearance, but with his own ostensibly blameworthy behavior: there may be reason for guilt, reason for him to sabotage his errant run. We note that we are no longer drawn to attend to legs—the action has moved on to arms and hands. "Good right arm" becomes "kissing her hands" becomes "[h]er minatory finger points" (88). While the shift from walking to running conveyed his increasing vitality, appropriately, the microscoping arm images foretell its constriction. Her command may well have tamed Shaw and Russell into making a supplicant's gesture; and faced with the power implicit in this threatening gesture, he no longer wills his way through the landscape but rather at her bequest. He passes under a "cardboard doorway" (89): the great oak, we note, is replaced by what has been built from the wreckage of trees. He is directed to a well, to a hole—a hole, which, as it is filling up with dirt, seems grave-like. He obliges his sudden feeling that it is "necessary to go / through dark and deeper

dark" (166-67), but unlike before when he had "kept his appointment" (60), he is not now rewarded for doing so. Instead, he finds himself far away from his testing-tree, and without his stones. He hasn't lost them; they were taken away—or at least that is what his cry, "Give me back my stones!" (111), suggests is what he thinks occurred. There is protest in this line, and, according to Sacks, one of the elegy's traditional conventions is to voice protest (though usually through "the form of a question" [22]) as it helps the mourner transform "grief" and/or "rage" into something purposeful. But according to Sacks the protest normally arises from having lost one's first and primary object of desire—one's close association with one's mother—not from just having lost the consolation prize, the object we were to transfer our love to and were supposed to get to keep. Conventional elegies, that is, are supposed to be "places" which enable a "substitutive turn" (5) *away* from the mother.

The narrative does not establish beyond doubt that his mother took the stones, but since she is the only threatening and commanding figure in the poem, she seems not just the likely but the *only* possible culprit. She is unmistakably the one responsible for eliminating the ostensible consolation prize in another mother-son poem, "The Portrait," however. Like the visiting strangers, like the testing tree and the precious stones, it is again something not readily associated with the maternal environment. But while in "My Mother's Pears" the object was brought to his door, but while in "The Testing Tree" he sought and found the object away from his door, in this

poem he has the effrontery to bring the object—the portrait of his father—straight to her! In protest. Just after describing how his mother had “locked his [i.e., his father’s] name / in her deepest cabinet / and would not let him out, / though I could hear him thumping” (7-10), we learn that he “came down from the attic / with the pastel portrait in [his] [. . .] hand” (11-12). She would not let him out, but Kunitz, by delineating many of the portrait’s details—never an innocent activity in his mother-son poems, for it always means his greater involvement with an object—sets him free. He would free the person she had enslaved, and by so doing demonstrate his intention and capacity to be free from her control. And in response, *she* demonstrates her power over him. As in many of his mother-son poems, the contest between the pair is staged through the use of their hands, and as is the case in other poems [even, debatably, in “The Magic Curtain], the contest is won by the more dominant power—by the mother, who rips up the object he covets, and then “slap[s] [him] [. . .] [so] hard” (18) he never forgets the blow.

Though I am assuming he intends to document his own life experiences in these poems, I am reluctant to accept that Kunitz manages to convey them without significant distortion. For these poems do not, in my judgment, portray the sort of struggle that would inspire recurring fears of annihilation. Indeed, there is in each of these poems nearly as strong a sense of his ability to make claim to his “name”—i.e., his own independent identity apart from his mother—as there is his difficulty in doing so. He describes his

relationship with his mother as “a battle of wills,” that “there were two strong wills in that household, hers and mine” (Busa 68), and even though the mother is portrayed as the victor, as possessing the superior authority, she is not the only one in these poems possessed of strong will. In “My Mother’s Pears,” the mother feels the need to make *two* commands to feel sure of her hold on him. With his hand on his shovel, with his declaration, “I summon up all my strength” (34), we sense his early manhood: she has him, but *is already* losing her hold on him. He is worthy of being contended with, unlike his sisters, who are girls, who are children, and who are appropriately readily waved away. In “The Testing Tree,” though he loses “the prize of mastery” (16), we don’t doubt he felt himself near to be “the world’s fastest human” (21)—that he knew from his movement from boyhood to adolescence what it was to feel an exhilarating sudden acquisition of previously unknown power. We might suspect, too, given our sense of him in the poem as efficacious, that in real life he probably hit the tree more often than not (in his interview with Christopher Busa, he says that he “almost never missed” [78]). And as I have suggested, in “The Portrait,” the slap across his face acknowledges his willful desire to contend with her, as well as their mutual awareness that gestures alone were no longer sufficient to keep him in line.

Perhaps he experienced his mother as these poems suggest he did, that is, as a castrating Father. Perhaps he first experienced her intention to thwart his will at the age he

portrays it as having occurred in his poems, in his late childhood—way past when Freudians argue the castration complex occurs, but not at any event in infancy. But Kunitz never got over feeling vulnerable to annihilation, and since traumas that can be recalled in significant verisimilitude don't "demand" constant re-engagement, for "they [haven't been] [. . .] split off [and therefore] need not be repeated" (DeMause 203), we have reason to wonder if Kunitz is in denial concerning the greater truth regarding his struggles with his mother. He indeed says "there was a good deal of denial that was associated with my childhood" (Kelen 54). And arguably, since he admits he is "closer to women and animals than [he is] [. . .] to any other category of living creature[,] [that he] [. . .] was brought up in a household of women, and that "[t]here wasn't a male presence around and it seem to run through a whole life pattern," yet it is only in his "later poems [that] powerful, combative women suddenly appear" (54), he may be very reticent to portray, or may actually be *incapable* of portraying, just how vulnerable he felt when his mother's will *first* pressed down on his own.

If he first experienced intense feelings of maternal resentment—the equivalent of the slap—when he was still *an infant*, then it could have been the source of lifelong feelings of annihilation, for it would not then have been readily accessible to the conscious mind to deal with, and would be too overwhelming to overtly grapple with in any case. And though perhaps never in his overtly mother-son poems, he may yet have manifested—however innocently—in some of

his other poems what it felt like to receive that slap at an age when her disapproval, her anger, would have felt absolutely life-threatening. "Robin Redbreast," for example, features something small and vulnerable about to be devoured by something vastly larger and more powerful—a god-like entity. It could have been plotted as "The Testing Tree" was. That is, before seeing it decimated we could have been made witness to its glory. Indeed, in other animal poems titled to suggest they tell of the greatness of the animal being attended to, such as "The Wellfleet Whale," this is how they are plotted. That is, unlike other poems in which a defeat of some kind occurs, we never are provided a sense of the protagonist when he ruled "his element" (23); we encounter here only the scenario "since Eden went wrong" (6). In "My Mother's Pears" and in "The Testing Tree," he *gets* dirtied, but the subject of this poem—the robin—is *introduced* to us not just dirtied but defeated: "It was the dingiest bird / you ever saw" (1-2). In "The Testing Tree" he "stood in the shadow" in the "saffron" "air" (72) and asked his father to "bless [his] [...] right arm"; in this poem the bird "stand[s] in the rain, / friendless and stiff and cold" (4-5). In "The Testing Tree" he (may have) needed assistance only because his self-assurance had him aim so high; this drained, "luck[less]" (22) bird requires assistance or he will simply suffer then die.

Given how the robin is depicted, the title seems absurd. We are expecting greatness and see no sign of it until we encounter the vital "blue" (32) sky—the sky, that is, that

would devour the pathetic little, “color[less]” (2) bird. That is, if the poem was to be about something great the proper subject of this particular poem, we are encouraged to think, should have been the sky. There is no battle of wills in this poem, for the bird is “wit[less]” (31)—the sky shines through its skull with its vital blue radiance. There is a sense that this pathetic bird made claim to something he did not possess sufficient resources to protect: as Kunitz portrayed himself in “My Mother’s Pears,” the robin here is made to seem a guilt-worthy interloper. And *this* is how a child would feel as he began to make claim to independence in face of his primary caretaker’s resistance. *This* is what it would feel like to be vulnerable to becoming nameless, to being demolished in a battle of wills. *This* is what it would feel like if at heart those magic Keds you wore, those boyhood pretensions to greatness, were really more evidence of your ongoing uncertainty than they were your joyful sense of yourself as a budding young adult.

Of course, this poem need not be understood as staging a contest between a parental power and a child. And even if one sees it this way, one could see it as a conflict between father and son. Gregory Orr, for instance—even though he argues that Kunitz’ poetry amounts to a quest for identity, and that “the motive and priority [of this quest] must be sought in the mother-son relationship,” and that “[i]n order to locate the quest for identity at one of its origins, we must comprehend the situation of a boy who is left fundamentally alone with a powerful mother,” and that “the mother is

consistently seen [in Kunitz’ poetry] as powerfully destructive of or inhibiting the son’s quest for autonomy” (9)—insists that the sky is a “cosmic force of *male* violence” (198; emphasis added), that the poem concerns Kunitz and his father. In my judgment, however, the sky’s personality—its “cold[ness],” its “unappeasable[ness]” (33)—should have us more thinking of Kunitz’ mother than of the father he never knew, for *she* was the one who “was unable to demonstrate affection” (Kelen 54), *she* was the one whose coldness to him he admits sourly affected him throughout his life. And if we look at how powerful women are portrayed in his poems, we note that so often they are often devouring and unappeasable. (In “The Daughters of the Horseleech,” for example, we encounter “[t]he daughters of the horseleech crying ‘Give? Give?’ / Implore the young men for the blood of martyrs” [1-2]; in “Careless Love” we hear of how “[t]his nymphomaniac enjoys / Inexhaustibly is boys” [15-16]; and in “Cleopatra” we understand that Cleopatra will soon “ravish [a young man with] [. . .] her beauty” [5].) But since even a critic who understands Kunitz’ mother as *the* powerfully destructive force in Kunitz’ life, could yet still deem the destructive force in this poem as the Father, Kunitz may have been able to make use of this poem to convey what it felt like to be vulnerable and powerless to maternal predations without thereby necessitating an engagement with something he hadn’t yet the resources to deal with.

If he felt the need to manifest in his poems what it felt like to be vulnerable to annihilation, he might have made use

of “In the Dark House” for this purpose as well. In “In the Dark House,” Orpheus awaits a “frenzied mob” (59) of women whose thirst for vengeance would not be satiated “except by [his] blood” (60). It is a terrifying poem—it ends with “trampling on the stairs” (62). The protagonist seems as vulnerable as the robin in “Robin Redbreast” is; but while in “Robin Redbreast” the reason for his forthcoming evisceration is subtly suggested to be his audacious claim on greatness—to possess a brilliant red breast which rivals in striking color the vital blue sky—in this poem it is not so much his physical vulnerability which undermines him as it is his own belief that he deserves punishment. We are asked, “How could he deny that frenzied mob, / not be assuaged except by blood, / when his own heart cried worse?” (59-62). And just as in so many of the overt mother-son poems, associating with forbidden objects invites punishment, here, making claim to Eurydice becomes cause for his eradication by predatory female beasts.

One might argue that it is inappropriate to identify Kunitz with Orpheus in this poem. After all, it begins with an epitaph that quotes Primo Levi—someone who, in that he felt pursued by terrors until “the end,” Kunitz imagined to have suffered Orpheus’ fate. But even if Kunitz saw Orpheus as Levi it does not preclude us from judging that he still largely had his own mother in mind when he wrote it. We imagine the maternal differently, but Peter Sacks believes that the Orpheus and Eurydice myth cannot but be used by the poet to document the effect his own parents had on his life,

of his early experiences and encounters with them. (Sacks in fact argues that Milton’s “Lycidas”—the poem that ostensibly determined the subsequent nature of all elegiac conventions—is a poem which is “not only affected by the loss of his mother but also designed for the eyes of his father” [106].) And we note that unlike the traditional pastoral elegy, unlike “Lycidas,” the person elegized is not in the end conjoined to an empowered, eternal, masculine order. That is, the poem lacks the traditional elegy’s “consoling apotheosis” (Zeiger 8). Yet it may have been consoling for Kunitz *specifically because it lacks such an apotheosis*. That is, if the poem *was* largely about his own concerns, about what being devoured by female terrors felt like, but managed to make Orpheus seem not the least his proxy but rather instead a part Orpheus-part Levi compound, then it may have helped him feel less susceptible to such a fate himself—for through sacrifice comes (some) appeasement.

Using one’s ability to craft poetry/narratives to stage sacrifices sounds morbid and sick, but in his note to “The Gladiators,” Kunitz shows he knows the connection between sacrifice and obtaining respite. He writes that the actual scandal he narrates in this poem, where another weak subject, the “monk [,] [. . .] [who] is running onto the field, / [who] [. . .] is waving his scrawny arms / to interrupt the games” 20-24), is eradicated by a “mob [who would] tear him to bits” (25), “lead to the proscription of man-to-man combats” (Kunitz, *The Collected Poems* 270). Kunitz may in fact have delighted in exposing his subjects to annihilation. He admits

as much in an interview with Bosa. In reference to “King of the River” he says, “[i]t may be pertinent that I experienced a curious elation while confronting the unpleasant reality of being mortal, the inexorable process of my own decay. Perhaps I had managed to ‘distance’ my fate—the salmon was doing my dying for me” (70).

Though Orr acknowledges that in some poems Kunitz “interpose[es] [others] [. . .] between the destructiveness implicit in the son-powerful mother dilemma” (209)—a way of making the unfortunate interposer seem a sacrificial lamb—he believes Kunitz was hoping to demonstrate his superiority to her. He points to “The Magic Curtain” and argues that here “forgiveness” is shown to “triumph” over his mother’s “never forgiving,” which thereby “affirms his identity as distinct from his mother’s” (11). But if in “The Magic Curtain” he indeed triumphs over her, the victory is squeezed in at the end: it is mostly yet another mother-son poem in which so much of promise ends up being lost to him (in this case his love, Frieda, and all objects associated with her). At least in interviews, Kunitz never acknowledges that his mother *intended* him harm. In response to Kelen’s conclusion/query, “I believe it took you half your life to begin to forgive your mother for what she withheld from you when you were growing up,” Kunitz replied that, “She loved me, and encouraged me in every way. But she was unable to demonstrate affection. She had lost that capacity through all the tragic circumstances of her life” (54). Here he sees her as a source of encouragement, not discouragement.

Furthermore, we notice that he deflects the blame elsewhere, onto whomever or whatever traumatized her. And so often in interviews and in his poetry, Kunitz establishes his father as the primary source of her distress.

Since in so many of his mother-son poems his growth is associated with blameworthiness, it is possible that he used his poetry to help persuade himself that someone else was *really* the blameworthy one. He may been trying to find an ideal sacrificial victim—that is, someone he could imagine as the true target of his mother’s disapproval, of her anger, for attending to needs other than her own. I’ve argued that “The Portrait” dramatizes Kunitz’s own desire for autonomy, and that the slap manifests her intention to keep him rooted to her, but this poem could readily be interpreted as one where *neither* the mother nor the son are truly the ones at fault. The blameworthy person is instead surely the one who left her without help, who left him without a father—his father. Admittedly, the poem plays at making her seem an ogre—the first line, especially, suggests that her unwillingness to forgive makes her nearly monstrous—but it quickly attends to all sorts of particulars that make her husband (and his father) seem errant and irresponsible. “[K]illing himself,” we note, makes suicide seem primarily an act of self-attendance, not of self-disregard—it makes it seem selfish. He killed himself away from home, away from her in a “public park” (4). His action is made to seem scandalous; lude, even. And it is worth noting that at least in one interview, when Kunitz discusses his father’s suicide he suggests that it couldn’t just have been

his subsequence absence which tormented his mother. He says “there must have been another woman, too, or mother wouldn’t have made the subject taboo” (Rodman 19). The poem therefore makes his father seem the bad boy, and he is the one who suffers the horrifying fate Kunitz (in real life) feared he himself was susceptible to. He becomes nameless; *the father* is the one who has “his name” [locked] / in her deepest cabinet” (7-8). We soon learn that the name is a synecdoche for the father himself: his father becomes subject to a fate Kunitz himself suffers in most of his mother-son poems, in finding himself trapped, encased in a “deep” (8) space.

But he doesn’t always make use of his father as he did the robin and Orpheus. He isn’t always or even often represented as a hapless victim. For in several poems his father is someone who could not easily be entrapped, is someone who possesses a marked capacity to attract, endure, and resist Kunitz’ mother’s hostile attention. For example, in “The Unquiet Ones,” as Orr argues: “he is able to give equal weight to the mother and to the father” (285). Before they “slip through narrow crevices / [. . .] / glide in [his] [. . .] cave of phantoms” (16-18), he has the two of them focused on one another. They are both “dissatisfied,” for “in death as in life / remote from each other, / having no conversation / except in the common ground / of their son’s mind” (9-15). They fuse at the end into one “two-faced god” (21), but throughout our sense of them is of two separate entities, linked because they are “my [i.e., his] parents” (2) and

because they cannot disengage from their personal feud. Lines such as “Father and mother lie” (3) and “in death as in life”—that is, lines in the poem that possess two subjects, two nouns, intractably connected to but spaced apart from one another—help establish his mother and father as both forever attached to *and* forever apart from one another. The poem may have helped Kunitz convince himself that his father played as important a role in his life as his mother did. His father was never there, but if he could convince himself his mother’s mind was always on him it would seem appropriate to allot them equal weight in his poems—it would seem appropriate to assume that when she was angry at him (i.e., Kunitz), she probably more had his father in mind. Though he fashioned many father-son poems in his youth, they probably didn’t serve to make him feel less deserving of and therefore less vulnerable to annihilation. Moreover, they probably betray his own vulnerability and neediness (Kunitz clearly knew as much, for in poems such as “Three Floors” and “Halley’s Comet,” his father appears in the poem after his mother has either checked up on him to make sure he “was sleeping” [“Three Floors” 4] or after she had “scolded” [“Halley’s Comet” 24] him.). “The Portrait” is a masterful contrivance whose creation likely had to wait until he felt capable of fully manifesting his angry mother in his poetry—the likely reason his mother, someone whom he admits was the primary influence on his life, only emerges in his poetry later in his life.

Kunitz found means to use his poems to feel less

vulnerable to annihilation other than through the staging of sacrifices. He found a way to “narrate” his own life, his own self, so that he felt entitled and became empowered to better maintain his gains. Exaggerating his physical prowess could backfire, for it would draw attention to his real weakness as well as invite upon him—as we saw in “Robin Redbreast” and “The Testing Tree”—angry vengeance. His poetry suggests that what actually works to make gains seem less susceptible to loss is for him to conceive of himself as having witnessed and endured more of life’s pains than its gains—to imagine himself, that is, a perpetual mourner.

The robin in “Robin Redbreast” is incapacitated, but we know that moments before being shot down all he knew was glory: arrogant pride and ebullient joy bring about vengeful decimation. But there is no arrogance evident in “I Dreamed That I Was Old,” a fantasy involving his elegizing his lost youth. He imagines himself as an old man, as someone who is “in stale declension” (1) and has lost his “cat-nimbleness” (3). He clearly isn’t enjoying the like of ripe fruit and sporting games here. Nor is he indulging in the aroma of “flower[ing] saffron—in fact, it is easy to read “stale stench” into “stale declension” (1). Rather than receiving visitors, he remembers “when company / [w]as mine” (2-3). For Kunitz, those two words—“was mine”—are, however, words of power. He sounds convinced that the gifts aging brings pail in comparison to those stubborn youthfulness provided him with, but he is not to be believed, for, as I have shown, youth and pleasure so often invite disaster and entrapment in his

poems while crippling old age actually enables successful evasion, as well as a surer hold on his name.

In “Passing Through,” to be aged means that in response to someone he identifies as “the first, / [. . .] to bully [him]” (15-16), he could confidently say that “[w]hatever you choose to claim / of me is always yours; / nothing is truly mine / except my name. I only / borrowed this dust” (29-33). It means that despite “hav[ing] no documentary proof / that [you] [. . .] exist” (14-15), you know for certain you possess a name, and not to be all concerned if another tries to cage, claim, or capture it—there is no protest registered in these lines, for he is unlikely to lose hold of it. That is, the wisdom he thought he’d possess as an old man in “I Dreamed That I Was Old,” he possesses in this poem, and it makes him seem more self-composed but less accessible. Thus: “Sometimes, you say, I wear / an abstracted look that drives you / up the wall, as though it signified / distress or disaffection” (18-20).

Since in Kunitz’ poetry being young means not just being playful but a potential victim, we understand how empowering it must be for him to arrive at a point in his life where he might believe himself “too old to be / anybody’s child” (“The Quarrel” 13-14). Being too old to be anybody’s child also means being old enough to be someone else’s parent. It means to be in a position where one finally might possess the same power a child grew up believing his parents possessed—the god-like power to create and destroy. If Kunitz imagined the aged, wizened speaker of “The Tutored Child” as himself, he portrays himself so he seems akin to his

parents in “The Unquiet Ones,” and even to the god-like sky in “Robin Redbreast.” Just as in “The Unquiet Ones,” his mother and father “slip through narrow crevices” (16) “into” (18) Kunitz’ mind, and just as in “Robin Redbreast,” the “cold flash of the blue / unappeasable sky” (32-33) shone through the hole of the robin’s “tunneled out [. . .] wits” (31), here he (or at least, the speaker) “[c]limbs through the narrow transom of [the child’s] [. . .] will” (15). In that it features an entity—the untutored child—who is “unlucky” (9), who is shown to suffer from the “touch” of others—“Mortals will touch you and your taste be spoiled” (12)—who is “vulnerable” (16), it is a poem reminiscent of “Robin Redbreast.” But here he actually is empowered to do something about wounds (which in this poem he caused), for he has nothing here to fear. No one looms over him in disapproval; instead, he arches over the child, with the final couplet describing his sympathetic attendance to the wounds and pains delineated in the preceding four quatrains. That is, while in “Robin Redbreast” his apostrophe “Poor thing! Poor foolish life!” (19) only briefly draws attention to him before we attend to the much stronger dramatic power—the sky—in “The Untutored Child” his [speaker’s] verse “My poor poor child whose terrors never cease” (69) terminates the poem and helps establish him as the poem’s true “star,” with no reprisals.

His final gesture in “The Tutored Child” is akin to the one he makes in “My Sisters.” Kunitz said that the death of his parents and sisters was empowering, and in this poem

(“My Sister”) we see the sort of pleasure the death of loved ones provides him with. Though he consoles his sisters, in that it shows there are still things he can do which can positively affect the deceased the poem performs the consoling function elegies are supposed to perform for the mourner. But it isn’t clear that his actions should be understood as kindly motivated. That is, even though the poem *does* convey his sisters’ love for Kunitz, as well as his own for them, like so many of his mother-son poems it stages a contest between family members. Just as attending to hand gestures is important to appreciating the full drama staged in many of his mother-son poems, attending to body-positioning is crucial to properly understanding the contest being staged here. At first his sisters—however benignly—loomed over him: “they bend over [him] [. . .] / to comfort [his [. . .] night fears” (13-14). With their death, he imagines himself over them. His action reverses and mirrors their own: very likely we imagine him bending over them while he tends to them. He does as much with his dead parents in “The Unquiet Ones” as well. Though in that poem he doesn’t console their fears (though, we note, he is not afraid of them: he is quite willing to identify them as “unwelcome guests” [19]), he does imagine them as, in part, confined to “cribs” (4): at least at the beginning of the poem, he infantilizes them, places them so he can imagine himself standing over them, as being appropriately placed to, if he should choose, haunt or terrorize them.

But if in these poems he contests the dead, they yet

remain elegiac, for in classical elegies the mourner must actually “wrest his inheritance from the dead” (Sacks 37). Given that he was raised in a household of women, making use of an elegy for some tit for tat also keeps it within the elegiac tradition, for elegies work to “reverse [one’s] [. . .] passive relation to the mother or matrix, perhaps even avenging himself against her and his situation” (Sacks 37).

Works Cited

- Brazelton, Berry and Cramer, Bertrand. *The Earliest Relationship: Parents, Infants and the Drama of Early Attachment*. Reading: Perseus Books, 1990. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. *The Emotional Life of Nations*. New York: The Institute for Psychohistory Press, 2002. Print.
- Keillor, Garrison. “Touch Me.” *The Writer’s Almanac*. Prairie Home Editions, 29 July 2005. Web. 15 Dec. 2006.
- Kunitz, Stanley. “Careless Love.” *The Collected Poems*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000. 77. Print.
- . “Cleopatra.” *The Collected Poems*. 175.
- . “Daughters of Horseleech.” *The Collected Poems*. 76.
- . “I Dreamed That I Was Old.” *The Collected Poems*. 38.
- . “In the Dark House.” *The Collected Poems*. 253-55.
- . “King of the River.” *The Collected Poems*. 170-72.
- . “My Mother’s Pears.” *The Collected Poems*. 249-50.
- . “My Sisters.” *The Collected Poems*. 214.
- . “Passing Through.” *The Collected Poems*. 238-39.
- . “Robin Redbreast.” *The Collected Poems*. 149-50.
- . “The Gladiators.” *The Collected Poems*. 161.

- . “The Magic Curtain.” *The Collected Poems*. 143-45.
- . “The Portrait.” *The Collected Poems*. 142.
- . “The Quarrel.” *The Collected Poems*. 212.
- . “The Testing Tree.” *The Collected Poems*. 180-83.
- . “The Tutored Child.” *The Collected Poems*. 69.
- . “The Unquiet Ones.” *The Collected Poems*. 213.
- . “Three Floors.” *The Collected Poems*. 168.
- . Interview with Christopher Busa. “The Poet in his Garden.” *Interviews and Encounters with Stanley Kunitz*. Ed. Stanley Moss. New York: Sheep Meadow, 1993. 68-91. Print.
- . Interview with Helen Kelen. *American Poetry Review* 27 (1998): 49-55. Print.
- . Interview with Selden Rodman. “Tongues of Fallen Angels.” *Interviews and Encounters with Stanley Kunitz*. 19-30. Print.
- Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1985. Print.
- Orr, Gregory. *Stanley Kunitz: An Introduction to the Poetry*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. Print.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994. Print.
- Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP 1985. Print.
- Zeiger, Melissa F. *Beyond Consolation: Death, sexuality, and the changing shapes of elegy*. New York: Cornell UP, 1997. Print.

Quitting Home (January 2006)

If we were to assemble a canon of Canadian texts based on their ability to help Canadians live better lives, we would do well to include Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House* as one of its core texts. The text is not simply "prairie lit"; it actually speaks to the concerns of most contemporary Canadians. The text's narrator, Mrs. Bentley, often expresses in her journal her fear that she lives in a threatening environment, yet she ultimately portrays her environment as more secure than insecure. It is in fact inspiring—the various pressing threats are manipulated so they actually empower her. And for the reader, the reading experience would not be anywhere near as claustrophobic and uncomfortable as we might assume it to be, given her frequent complaints of Horizon's horrors. The text in fact often feels spacious, roomy, and offers the reader pleasing variety, and ultimately serves as a place to settle in awhile while we learn to make our re-engagement with the real world more purposeful and legitimate.

After 9-11, even literary critics have been left considering

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

whether we might now more exist within a concurrent, traumatic world than we do a postmodern one. But even before 9-11 made the world seem so threatening, Canadians well knew what it was to feel threatened by their surroundings, for if psychohistorians such as Lloyd DeMause are correct, throughout history most people have not received sufficient support from their caretakers—specifically, from their mothers—to be empowered to feel otherwise. He believes most people are prone to imagine the world as a threatening place, for most of us learn early on that to be apart from our mothers, to belong to a world outside of her near environment, means feeling abandoned and alone. The reason separation comes to seem so threatening owes to most of us not having mothers themselves loved and cared for enough to be accepting when we turn away from them and focus mostly on our own concerns. Instead, our departure is experienced as us abandoning them—as a deliberate, neglectful act, that is—and they retaliate in kind: they withdraw their love and support, to our psychic devastation. The result, as Joseph Rheingold explains, is a perpetual fear of death:

Basically, it is generally agreed, separation means separation from the mother. It may hold no connotation of punishment, but its more significant meaning is desertion by the mother. Although in infancy the mere absence of the mother is a threat to survival, separation becomes associated with purpose,

that is, with abandonment. Death is equated with willful withdrawal of the mother. Separation anxiety seems to be universal and is a major source of death anxiety throughout life. (17)

As a psychoanalyst Rheingold devotes himself to assisting patients feel less overcome with death anxiety. He believes his profession empowers him to help, for “[t]here is no more powerful corrective force than the ‘good-mother’ protectiveness of the therapist” (227). But perhaps even if not as good, texts—that is, alternative worlds, traumatized, abandoned readers might immerse themselves in—also function as a powerful corrective force, by provisioning readers with some of the security they need to live healthy, non-cloistered, lives.

Psychologists and literary theorists are developing an increasing respect for the importance of texts as therapeutic aids, with most discussion now not on *whether* or not they may ease suffering but on *which* sorts of texts are most helpful (Vickroy 12). Though the study of reader immersion has “not been particularly popular with the ‘textual’ brands of literary theory” (15) as “it conflicts with [their] [. . .] concept of language” (92), reader-response literary theorists and cognitive psychologists who study readers’ involvement in texts generally agree that reading involves the reader in “creating” a world that “stretch[es] in space, exist[s] in time” (Gerrig 15). The cognitive psychologist Richard Gerrig argues that the text actually “serve[s] as [a] habitat” (15) for the

reader, that readers are “placed” within it as “side-participants or overhearers” (119). He does not believe that “transportation into a narrative world is dependent on narrative skills” (95), but surely not all texts draw readers in equally. We know that realist texts were once accused of evoking emotional responses to an unprecedented degree, and it may be that modernist texts, though sometimes imagined as implacable, as deliberately designed to actually *refuse* the reader (even if only to drive some select few of them to pursue on to greater depths), are potentially even more involving than realist fiction is. According to Norman Cantor, “the burden of the modernist novel [is actually the] [. . .] existential discovery of a deeper, mythic, more human self” (53); it “does contain a story, which may be by turns elaborate and minimal, but it serves only as a vehicle for the exploration of sensibility on the part of the author, which helps the reader to discover him—or herself” (53). If Cantor is correct that texts which explore an author’s sensibility can lead the reader to profound personal discoveries, then *As For Me and My House*, which is all about the exploration of the psychic/emotional life of Mrs. Bentley as she explores her new habitat, Horizon, might be an especially immersive text for the reader to inhabit. However, if readers are likely to share Mrs. Bentley’s “process of locating and displacing herself” (Kroetsch 217) in Horizon, if they are thereby drawn to vicariously experience her own emotional response to her environment, how, if they are indeed insecure, could they possibly be thought to benefit from being introduced—like

this?:

It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it. The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind. Close to the parsonage is the church, black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it. There's a soft steady swish of rain on the roof, and a gurgle of eavestroughs running over. Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned. I wish Philip would waken. (8)

We should note that insecure readers (i.e., those who experienced feelings of maternal abandonment) would be especially affected by this description, as they would be the ones to lend themselves most to it. As Bessel Van der Kolk writes: "Many traumatized people expose themselves, seemingly compulsively, to situations reminiscent of the original trauma." (389). But if this passage merely satisfied a reader's repetition compulsion, little good would come of it, for though "Freud thought that the aim of repetition was to gain mastery, [. . .] clinical experience has shown that this

rarely happens" (Van der Kolk 389). But though it begins and consistently throughout arouses readers' fears and anxieties, *As For Me and My House* ultimately does more assuage than pointlessly recall and revisit them.

The nighttime environment has readers share Mrs. Bentley's harrowing vulnerability, but there are those about whose company can help them feel at ease. Readers might in fact be looking to find sanctuary within a maternal environment, for as Rheingold argues, fears of abandonment "motivate the wish to return to the uterus" (18), to the empowered mother, and they find someone aptly suited to safeguard them in Mrs. Finley. They encounter her immediately after hearing of Mrs. Bentley's fearful nighttime experience, and it is doubtful whether she could have been made to seem more its perfect counter. The night could make the houses "helpless," but it is hard to imagine it doing likewise with Mrs. Finley, for she is "austere" (8) and forceful. The night sky could make the town cower, to be "afraid to move lest it topple into the wind." Hardly fearful, she is instead the town's "leader," with a "crusading steel in her eye [which] [. . .] warns she brooks no halfway measures" (8), and with a "hand that never falters" (9). The night sky blankets the "little" town, but since she "manag[es] the town [,] [. . .] [and] mak[es] it over in her own image" (8), she too keeps the town under wraps.

More than someone who is "self-important" (185), as the scholar Frank Davey understands her, she *is* important to the town: there is no indication that she is anything less than its

leading matriarch. “[S]elf-assumed” (8), but alone as its head, nevertheless. But she may indeed overall strike us as less someone who is distinct and particular than as someone who is simply another member of the matronly mass that rules Horizon. Mrs. Bentley tells us that “Mrs. Finley and her kind are the proverbial stone walls against which unimportant heads like [hers] are knocked in vain” (17), making her seem fated to be as casually managed by them as their husbands already are—to become like Mrs. Finley’s “meek little man” (9) of a husband, who exists with a “cage drawn over him” (9), or like Mrs. Lawson’s, whose life is akin to that of “a plodding Clyde” “managed [by] [. . .] a yelping little terrier” (27). That is, though she is made to seem someone who would safeguard Mrs. Bentley (and the insecure reader), she is also someone who could command from her her own self-command and individuated status; an affliction those who out of fear seek refuge with the maternal can only expect (Rheingold 17).

Because Mrs. Finley is made to seem part of a matronly mass which not only rules but define the town’s space, she also threatens upon the reader their envelopment. That is, though Robert Kroetsch’s argument that to be “in” Horizon is to be within a “feminine” “space” (“The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction” 114) has proven influential, readers nevertheless more experience Horizon as maternal and matronly than as feminine. Most of the women in the novel, we note, are described as portly—we are to think of them quite literally as a surround. This would be something we

would notice in any case, but the text begins so that we are cued to take in Mrs. Wenderby’s “portl[iness]” (5). For just before being told of her rotundity, we were told she came by to “size [the Bentley’s] [. . .] up and see how much [they] [. . .] own” (5): no doubt, that is, we reciprocate, and size her up as well. We are subsequently told of how “[t]he town seeme[d] huddled together,” which has us thinking of its structures as bodily conjoined. And emerging from the huddle is the town’s most distinctive and important structure—the church, a structure described to seem a maternal, birthing, womb-like structure. Though Helen Buss believes that the church, which is “black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it,” is clearly a patriarchal structure (196), for insecure readers whose defining experience of abandonment is associated with the maternal, the fact that it merges with the abandoning nighttime environment works against it being thought of in this way. And while it is true that linear height is at times associated with masculinity in the text—his looming height probably helps make Mr. Bentley seem resolute and manly, for instance—at this point in the text masculinity is more clearly associated with squareness than with linearity—we understand, for example, that though linear Main Street is presided over by “Main Street hostess[es]” (9), no such claim is made upon Mr. Bentley’s “stalwart, four-square, Christian sermon” (7).

Triangles, however—which suggest the birthing body, with its emphasis on lower girth—are initially made to seem

maternal, and the next substantive description of the church has it likened to a vast triangular structure—one which births. That is, when she describes her own home for us in her third journal entry, Mrs. Bentley describes its relation to the church so that the church seems akin to a birthing mother. She says, “It’s a small, squat, grayish house, and pushed up against the big, glum, grayish church it looks so diminutive that [she’s] [. . .] reminded of the mountain that did all the fussing and gave birth to a mouse” (18-19). The church has already been made to seem as if possessed of matrons for innards, for when the church congregation is described we hear only of the “women in their humdrum forties” (14), and when the church choir is described, we learn that it too is composed of “matrons, middle aged and on” (15). The delineation of another triangular, wide-hipped “entity” follows immediately afterwards in the text. We meet Mrs. Ellington, and learn that she is a “large, Norwegian woman, in shape and structure rather like a snowman made of three balls piled on top of one another” (19), and that “[h]er broad red face is buttoned down like a cushion in the middle with a nose so small that in profile it’s invisible” (19). Her nose is to her face as Mrs. Bentley’s house is to the church: both are tiny or near invisible in comparison to the more relevant structure. In addition, we are also told that Mrs. Ellington’s home houses “boarders and chickens” (19). Hens seem more maternal than chickens, but since we are told their eggs are brought over to the Bentleys for dinner, they are made to seem maternal enough.

The environment *As For Me and My House* affords the reader, then, faces them with the drawbacks of seeking an escape to a maternal fold out of fear of an abandoning world; and, indeed, Mrs. Bentley repeatedly complains of how living in Horizon means to live in a domineering and smothering environment. Her journal in fact begins with evidence that the Bentleys do become like the matrons’ husbands in their doing as directed. We find Mr. Bentley hard at work “putting up stovepipes and opening crates” (5). He is poor at this sort of work, but he does it because the matrons expect him to be the one who “get[s] up on the roof and put[s] a few new shingles on” (8). Mrs. Finley is not to be fiddled with; the Bentleys “defer” (10) to her, and accept that survival will mean adapting themselves so they serve the matrons’ needs rather more than their own: “I’m afraid it [i.e., Mrs. Finley’s crusading intent to shape all ‘in her own image’] may mean some changes for Philip and me too” (8). It means that they will have to show they have the needs of the community foremost in mind, exactly the position children are placed in in regards to their immature mothers. And we note how in Mrs. Finley’s presence Mrs. Bentley can become girl-like: Finley “sent [her] [. . .] fiddling with [her] [. . .] apron like a little girl” (8). If they act the way they want, Horizon will notice and disapprove. So since Mrs. Bentley knows that Mrs. Finley and her kind would disapprove if she associated too closely with Judith, even though she would really like to become more familiar with her she concludes that she “will have to be friends with Judith warily” (8). And in the same

passage, she also hurries her journey home, out of a fear that Horizon will be reminding [them] [. . .] of [their] [. . .] extravagance” (17) should they see “two lamps burning” late at night.

But if readers feel inadequate, if they feel insecure, if they feel unattended to, alone, abandoned, they will enjoy knowing that the person they are most likely to identify and associate with—Mrs. Bentley—is fussed over as much as she in fact is in the text. For equally evident in the text as the matrons’ command *over* her is, is the great interest they take *in* her. She clearly matters to them. We are told that Mrs. Bentley is in fact understood *mostly* as a valued commodity, for associating with the minister’s wife means elevating one’s status in the town (58). Respect for her high value is apparent right from the start: we are told that Mrs. Finley “must have spent hours preparing for [them] [. . .], cleaning her house, polishing her cut glass and silver” (9). Of course, the attendance Horizon provides is frequently made to seem mean-spirited and hostile, however subtly worked in, but Mrs. Bentley herself admits that a hostile environment is to be preferred to an indifferent one—and the reader might well share her preference. In regards to a different environment—the wilderness—she says, “The stillness and solitude—we think a force or presence into it—even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us—for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we have no meaning at all” (131). And we note a hostile environment actually has its use, for it can enable the expression of what might otherwise remain kept-in

rage. Rheingold argues that those who’ve experienced maternal neglect are usually loath to express their anger at their mothers, that “child[ren] fear the consequences of not loving the mother or of bearing her animosity” (200). “The child is enjoined to show love for the mother, and failure to do so carries a threat, for the child must protect the mother’s defenses against her perception, and the perception by others, of her lack of motherly feeling or her hostile impulses. One must love his mother, or perish, or at least suffer guilt” (201). So it is indirect—Mrs. Bentley never vents her anger at mothers, specifically—but the reader does often experience her fearlessly and forcefully expressing her anger at what the reader has been primed to consider actually mostly a maternal environment—Horizon. They experience, for instance, her desire for the wind to “work its will” (57) and destroy the town, for “[her] [. . .] fingers itch to smudge it out” (92), for her husband’s “fingers on the town’s throat, smiling exactly the same way” (95), and for her piano playing to be “charge[d]” “to the town’s complete annihilation” (18).

Though not as gruesomely nor as violently, she does still yet express her irritation and disdain for the town’s matrons as well; and when she does, she seems much more the risible adolescent fed up with limits than she does the small child defaulted to fiddling with her clothes. And in these instances she most definitely evidences her need that “adults will help keep [her] [. . .] anger, greed, frustration, and other negative emotions in check” (224), a need the child psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan argues we all needed to have satisfied when we

were young, but may have missed out on. If readers missed out on such attendance they might enjoy both vicariously participating in her expression of rage *and* in sharing her having her more truant behavior kept in check. At times Mrs. Bentley describes her truancy so we sense her desire to be caught out and reprimanded for it. One description in particular could not make her more seem an adolescent concerned to provoke a reigning-in from parents—specifically, when she describes how she allowed “grizzled, dirty-looking men” (103) to give her a ride back home. We note she could have had them drop her off before she reached town, but preferred to see if she could sneak into “Main Street unobserved” (103). Of course, she ends up finding herself “tongue[-tied]” and “helpless” (103) before the matrons. She pretends to have hoped to have avoided such a fate, but nowhere else does she more seem the unreliable narrator than here: that is, since throughout the text she describes how Horizon’s eyes are forever watching her, it is difficult for us to believe she didn’t expect to have her mischief noticed, even punished.

Smothering, too, is something Mrs. Bentley must endure. Over and over again we hear of how her surroundings press down upon her. We note that when she wants to convey her claustrophobia, she does so by writing tightly packed sentences—ones with clumped adjective or noun clusters. Her house was originally described to us as “a small, squat, grayish house [. . .] pushed up against the big, glum, grayish church”: the adjective clusters help convey the smothering

proximity of the structures. This description occurs in her third journal entry, an entry that makes clear why her house is so depressing, why it provides little privacy from onlookers, and this entry, in particular, is filled with these clusters. We hear of “insistent little bright pink roses that stare at you like eyes” (17), of a smell which is “not just a bad, aggressive smell, just a passive, clinging one,” of “faded old carpets, trying the hard, leather easy chairs with broken springs” (18), and of heat that is “dense, rigid” (110), “dense, sickly” (114), and “dense, clotted” (150). And it is no wonder she wants to flee the “hot, dry, dusty little cupboard of a house” (93), for when words are “jam[med] [. . .] up so close” (56) together we feel how her living in it means being pinched within a “vice” (21).

But contrary to the opinion of literary critics such as David Stouck who believe that Mrs. Bentley’s “narration” is “claustrophobic” (103), most readers likely overall experience her journal as more spacious than tight. Helen Buss understands Mrs. Bentley’s “abandon[ment] [...] of the structured, practiced world of the pianist for the ‘longer, looser mode’ of the diarist” (193), as an effective means for her to feel less constrained. But we should note that the diary is composed of many Augustan sentences, and that they too assist the text in feeling less cramped, for they make sentences feel girded. She writes that her and her husband’s “muscles and lungs seem[ed] pitted to keep the walls from caving in” (97). The key words in this sentence—“muscles,” “lungs,” “pitted,” “keep,” “walls”—are evenly spaced apart,

and may indeed be experienced by readers as if they are support columns within the textual world that keep it from caving in. In the same passage she declares that “[t]he wind and the sawing eaves and the rattle of windows have made the house a cell” (97): yet again she spaces the pressing subjects so that the sentence feels more a sturdily constructed and roomy house than a tight cell. Often, however, her diary is written as if she experiences her everyday world casually, non-chalantly. We get, for instance, “We had eggs and bread and butter and tea, and a spoonful of honey for Steve” (7), and “[m]y peas and radishes are coming through. I spent a long time up and down the rows this morning, clearing away the dust that was drifted over them; and at intervals, so that I wouldn’t attract too much attention” (89), and “Philip needs shoes and a hat. His Sunday suit is going at the cuffs again, and it’s shiny at the seat and knees” (53). This is pedestrian subject matter presented to us in a routine, everyday fashion.

Rather than rushed and packed, then, many of the sentences are lengthy and unhurried. Both sorts of sentences may however combine with all the repeated sorts of imagery to make the text feel of pleasing variety: it may make the overall read a satisfying window-shopping experience akin to the sort of experience Mrs. Bentley might have enjoyed at Christmas had it not reminded her of her poverty (194). We encounter a pleasing variety of different mythic pantheons (Greek, Christian, Nordic, Gothic), for example. Soil, earth, and metal imagery are put to various and interesting use as well. I have already suggested that shapes affect our

phenomenological appreciation of the text, and so too colors—indeed, she showcases them, makes them seem clue-laden. We likely sense that something of Judith’s oddness has to do with her “queer white skin” (211), that something important lies behind Mr. Bentley’s decision (in regards to the choice of color for Steve’s coat) to “cast his vote for blue” (53), that Paul’s “bright red spotted handkerchief” is surely what lends him his “histrionic dash” (53), that El Greco’s “green and shin[y]” (169) eyes are what make him seem wolf-like, and that Mrs. Holly’s “green, freshly-laundered dress, and [. . .] green ribbon” (35) is what makes Mrs. Bentley green with envy—“with clothes like that I might be just as attractive” (35).

As Buss notes, there is a terrific play with imagery as Mrs. Bentley experiments here and there with the potential the “words of her diary offer her” (198) to counter oppression and liberate herself. She believes that Mrs. Bentley, “given [. . .] only the narrow private world in which to exercise her creativity, uses what she has, in the way a male artist might use the larger world at his disposal, as material for the realization of the self” (198). But if those psychologists who argue that children of immature mothers end up inhibiting their participation in the world for fear of evoking memories of maternal disapproval are correct, readers need not be hemmed-in women to enjoy Mrs. Bentley’s use of whatever handy to enfranchise herself. But before delineating how she subverts imagery to do so, it is worth noting that as the journal writer, as the tale-teller, she is in a position to

empower herself over her readers—and certain sections in particular *do* read as if she crafted them with an awareness of her position over them foremost in mind.

Though I maintain that the text is less tight and dense than some critics assume readers experience it, she still does at times get the reader to tighten up. She will intentionally switch from evenly spaced to tighter phrasing for this purpose. For instance, she follows telling us how “[t]he sun through the dust looks big and red and close” (96), by informing us that it is “[b]igger, redder, closer every day” (96): she helps ensure that we too are more likely to experience “a doomed feeling, [to fear] that there is no escape” (96). Like Percy Shelley, she at times co-opts the will of the wind to make us experience how it’s affecting her, especially when she tells us that:

Sometimes it sinks a little, as if spent and out of breadth, then comes high, shrill and importunate again. Sometimes it’s blustering and rough, sometimes silent and sustained. Sometimes it’s wind, sometimes frightened hands that shake the doors and windows.
(52)

We, too, are encouraged to consider the wind “nerve-wracking” (52), but it was the delineation of the wind’s characteristics, her power over us as journal writer, which ultimately rattled our nerves. But though I think she at times writes with readers in mind, and though I think she exploits

her power as narrator to not just delineate truths but to discomfort those who’ve let themselves to be susceptible to her, I agree with Buss that Mrs. Bentley is mostly concerned to use words to empower herself against oppressors.

Early on in the text, Mrs. Finley is associated with crusaders. We note that just after she finally contrives means to rebuff the town’s matrons, Mrs. Bentley makes use of swordsman imagery to portray how she feels and behaves. Of course, she often describes herself as “steeling” herself against her environment (her husband, in particular, is frequently described as having steel or leaden eyes—ones, we note, that can “clear a room” [116]), but it is really when she likens herself to a swordsman who parries blows that she effectively co-opts this imagery to make herself equal to the town’s matriarch, to all the town’s oppressive “weaponry.” After successfully using scripture to legitimize her claim to Steve, she writes, “I parried them, cool and patient” (81). Her successful rebuff leads to her feeling protected, to her now feeling as if she possesses a “false front” (81)—a structure associated with Horizon’s smothering drabness but also with its resilience and persistence. She had need of it, for the matrons’ disapproval was leading to her feel compressed, with her own house, hardly her ally. Though she had tried to get it to “respond to her” (34), to help ward against a disproving outside environment, she wrote that “[t]here’s something lurking in the shadows, something that doesn’t approve of me, that won’t let me straighten my shoulders. Even the familiar old furniture is aloof. I didn’t know before

it was so dull and ugly. It has taken sides against me with the house" (34). But exhilarated by the front she herself has created, she can now block out unwelcome attention. She writes, "And none of them knows. They spy and carp and preen themselves, but none of them knows. They can only read our shingle, all its letters freshened up this afternoon, *As For me and My House—The House of Bentley—We Will Serve the Lord* (81)."

The perpetrating "outside" also has difficulties with her husband's office space. That is, though she actually finds a way to imagine her home as an ally, she consistently describes her husband's study as being "always loyal to him" (85). It rebuffs all intruders, and it may in fact be described as a "stronghold" (85) so that Mrs. Bentley can better see it as an effective counter to the stone walls she knew she would repeatedly knock her head against in vain. Both he and his office space possess power akin to that held by the wilderness hills. In reference to the hills, she says, "We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. [. . .] We shrink from our insignificance" (131). And in reference to her husband and to his study, she says:

I like Philip's study, but I'm seldom in it. Not even when he's out, except to clean and dust. It's reserved somehow, distant, just like him. It's always loyal to him. It sees and knows him for what he really is, but it won't let slip a word. This study and the others before it—they're all the same. You don't obtrude.

You don't take liberties. It's like being a child in the presence of grown-ups who have troubles that can't be explained to you. The books understand, but you don't. (61)

It may be that Mr. Bentley's association with the hills helps counter his association with the mountainous maternal church, an enclosure which, though it first promised escape, proved only to circumscribe his life.

He is made to seem a potential rival to the town's leading matriarch, for, just after delineating Mrs. Finley's ability to manage the town, Mrs. Bentley informs us that her husband "has a way of building in his own image, too" (9). But we note that after having had first establishing him as an upstart, Mrs. Bentley now tells us of how weary he has become. At times, she needs for him to be weary, needs *to think of him* as weary, out of deference to a superior need many readers might also share—security. She needs to know that if she leaves a dispiriting but familiar life that she is fully prepared for what may lie ahead. Those who flee the town too hastily, we note, are humbled, even decimated. Judith, we are told, when she suddenly left her family to seek work abroad, couldn't manage her way in the world, and El Greco dies, after suddenly following upon his instinct to make for the wilderness. That is, when she writes that "with a man like Philip, you don't predict the future from the past" (15), she expresses her fears as well as her hopes for the man. She needs to imagine him as strong and unpredictable as "an

existential hero" (Moss 141) so that he seems suited to lead her away from a dispiriting life, but also fears his strength and erratic nature because it could leave her once again alone and fearful. But Mrs. Bentley proves not just an empowered writer but a clever and effective manager. She doesn't adversarially manage her husband about like a trained terrier would a plough horse, but she still prevents him from expressing his hatred at a moment which would have led to their pre-mature eviction from town. And if insecure readers want to feel at ease while reading the text, they would be pleased with her here, for they too would not want to risk (at some level) re-experiencing abandonment. So though Mrs. Bentley blames herself for doing so, she did the right thing: she needed time to better prepare herself so that departure from her familiar life seems more righteous and (therefore) less threatening—that is, as not just as something she needed or wanted for her own benefit.

Though near the end of the text Mrs. Bentley writes of how she is not "progressing" (196), this is actually opposite the case. We know that she makes this claim while she is accumulating sufficient funds to provision a new life for herself; and she may in fact be using her journal to progressively work toward believing she deserves to make use of her accumulating funds to accomplish what she really wants in life. Her journal, we note, is replete with delineations of just how impoverished she is. She lives a drab and disappointing life: we hear, for instance, of her drab house, her drab dress, and her (ostensibly) drab (same ol' same ol')

everyday experiences. Just as often she makes clear how most others live nowhere near as drably as she does. Every once in awhile she expresses her belief that she deserves more, but she says it with more conviction as her journal progresses, particularly after another key plot development—her husband's affair with Judith. This is quite the betrayal, and does enormous harm, for she had earlier made clear that he alone could have made life in Horizon bearable. But it is also, however, liberating, for she writes that since "he's been unfaithful to [her] [. . .], [she] ha[s] a right now to be free" (163): his betrayal empowers her better justifying her own needs. We note after she makes this assertion how assured her complaints of others' indulgences become. Thinking of payments owed them by Kirby (a town they had once lived in), she says, "There wasn't a woman in the congregation whose clothes were as dowdy and plain as mine. They never missed their little teas and bridge parties" (165). She seems irritated, but also determined. She admits she "want[s] to get away now more than ever" (166), and may now be ready for the move, for if she and Philip moved on to a better life their accomplishments there wouldn't feel so undeserved.

This—suspecting at heart you're unworthy of happiness—is what would draw a masochist to undermine any success she achieved, to as speedily as possible deplete any store of sums she had patiently acquired, and by so frequently making use of her journal to delineate all the various wounds Horizon and her husband have inflicted upon her, she gives every appearance of being one. But even

if *she* isn't (but really, she is), many of her *readers* might be, for masochism is a psychic defence adopted to help fend off concerns of maternal retribution. As Rheingold explains, "It takes its origin in the child's compliance with or appeasement of the destructive attitudes and impulses of the mother" (21), and helps the child pretend that she isn't really attending to her own needs, really isn't behaving in any way worthy of maternal punishment. The text, though, may help masochists in feeling that they too can narrate their life so that self-growth becomes more acceptable. Maybe, they might be more likely to conclude, others out there are indulging themselves much more than they themselves have been—perhaps *they* are the ones who truly deserve punishment, not so much the comparatively modest ourselves. Maybe, they might conclude, the severity of their own past suffering and stress—the insecurity owing to world conditions after 9-11 but *a* source—has been such that they are now finally *entitled* to a reprieve, that they are now actually owed some happiness. Some psychohistorians argue that ancient civilizations used to practice child sacrifice to feel they might now be allowed to keep, not only their crops but their remaining children (DeMause 137). Perhaps the lose-one-keep one "logic" behind infant sacrifice holds true for those clearly nowhere disturbed enough to be infanticidal—perhaps, that is, the loss of Steve and El Greco might help Mrs. Bentley feel more entitled to keep her husband's and Judith's child. Just as she deemed Kirby's indulgent behavior fair reason to firm up her claim to the money owed them,

Judith's indulgence might make her feel more entitled to take her (i.e., Judith's) baby away from her.

At one point in her journal she suggests that Horizon is unnatural for it being out of sync with the earth's underlying rhythms. For such disregard and disrespect, it (i.e., Horizon) is obstinate and "insolent" (23)—bad. We note that she might then have been making way for her own departure from town to be in account with nature—and therefore ultimately appropriate and "right"—for her departure is in accord with a rhythm—that of expulsion, following inflation—which determines how and when relevant objects appear and disappear from Horizon. Just before "they t[ook] Steve away" (152), she tells us that the heat of the town "had been gathering and tightening [. . .] for weeks" (150). She writes that "[i]t's like watching an inflated, ever distending balloon, waiting with bated breath for it to burst" (150). Just before they "lost El Greco" (196) we are told that, after looking "at the houses and thinking of all the suspense and excitement inside," after thinking of how in contrast her own "little house [. . .] seemed [. . .] dead and dry [,]" she felt "like an abscess [was] gathering [inside her] [. . .] [which promised] release" (195). Especially given the text's substantial attendance to the Bentleys' need for a child, the plotting would be understood by the reader as of birth following late-term pregnancy. Her exodus from town seems natural and appropriate because it follows, accompanies, her husband's baby's emergence from Judith's birth canal. Her exodus is primed and timed to seem as if it well could be overlooked,

because Horizon's appetite for hubris is satiated by the adulteress Judith's demise (which, we note, is [essentially] concurrent with the baby's birth).

Would an insecure reader benefit from Bentleys' birth into a new world? Indeed they would: they would find their own emergence from the textual world less jarring. More substantively, they would at some level sense that when the world about them feels most oppressive, most depressing and dispiriting, there might, somewhere in the near horizon, in fact be a promising new world about to receive and relieve them. In the meantime, the text served as a secure place to equip themselves with the narrative and reasoning resources to help manage the world in its current and still very threatening state.

Works Cited

- Buss, Helen. "Who are you, Mrs. Bentley? Feminist Re-vision and Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*." *Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House: Five Decades of Criticism*. Ed. David Stouck. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1991. 190-208. Print.
- Cantor, Norman. *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1997. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. *Foundations of Psychobiography*. New York: Creative Roots, 1982. Print.
- Gerrig, Richard J. *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.

- Greenspan, Stanley. *The Growth of the Mind: And the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997. Print.
- Kroetsch, Robert. "Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction." *Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House*. 111-20. Print.

Matricide in the City (2006)

Chapters twelve to fifteen of *The Invisible Man*, in which the invisible man moves away from the mother-figure Mary toward Jack and the Brotherhood, might be read as staging the Freudian drama of the child's move away from his mother at the father's command. But since with Freud the child prefers to remain united to the mother, and since the invisible man—despite his claims to the contrary—clearly does not want to remain alongside Mary, the drama here isn't a Freudian one. What it is, instead, is a dramatization of the story behind modern, thriving New York in the 1920s, for New Yorkers believed their freedom depended on detaching themselves from the influence of the preceding age, an age of smothering subservience, lorded over by Victorian matriarchs, and in creating its counterpart, its counter—an unforgiving Masculine era.

In *Terrible Honesty*, an examination of New York in the '20s, Ann Douglas argues that “slaying of the Titaness—the Mother God of the Victorian era—was the most important

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

instigation of the modern urban era” (252). “Cultural matricide,” she argues, “gave fresh access to an adventurous new world of uninhibited self-expression and cultural diversity, a world the Titaness's bulk had seemed designed expressly to block” (253). She says she finds it peculiar that moderns felt the need to slay the Victorian matriarch, the Titaness—that is, the “[w]hite middle-class women [who] had seized the reins of national culture in mid-and late-[American] Victorian era” (6)—since the “women they criticized most savagely were dead and buried by the 1920s” (243). But she concludes that moderns imagined the Victorian matriarch as a Goddess, as something too powerful to be counted on not to linger—to *more than linger*—on.

Why they imagined her this way becomes more evident, I think, if we take John Watson's—the behaviorist, popular 20s “child expert,” and mother-hater supreme—conception of the typical child's experience along side his/her mother as an indication of how mothers *actually* interacted with their children at the time. Watson wanted children to spend as little time with their mothers as possible, for he believed that from infancy on children experience their mothers as oppressors—as far more a source of trauma than nurturance—for “[m]ost mothers [. . .] displace[d] their unsatisfied sexual longings onto to their children under the guise of ‘affection.’” (43). To support his attack on the myth of selfless maternal devotion, Watson attends to how infants react to their mothers' handling of them. The revulsion he claims children experienced, and which he *himself* experienced while watching

mothers swarm over them, is akin to the revulsion the invisible man experiences after finding himself pressed up against a large woman in a subway train while on his way to Harlem—that is, when he found himself “crushed against a huge woman in black who shook her head and smiled while [he] [. . .] stared with horror at a large mole that arose out of the oil whiteness of her skin like a black mountain sweeping out of rainwet plain” (Ellison 158).

If most moderns had in fact experienced their mothers’ bodies this way, if their earliest experiences were of such intolerable smothering, it would explain why they felt the need to distance themselves so strongly from maternal figures, and why, also, they feared they would never quite extricate themselves from them. But because this encounter is by accident, that is, because it is not one in which the wide-bodied woman *encouraged* his enmeshment within her, it is not one which illustrates why moderns feared that unless they slew the Matriarch they would remain her proxy and pet. More than a hint of this, however, can be found in the invisible man’s accounting of his time with Mary.

Just as his first negative encounter in New York was his being sandwiched against the large-bodied woman in the subway train, his second emergence, following his leaving the factory hospital, is introduced so that once again it seems as if he will find himself in an anxious situation, brought upon by grossly large maternal masses. But though his “wild, infant eyes” are confronted with “[t]wo huge women [. . .] [.] [who] seemed to struggle with their massive bodies as they came

[toward him], their flowered hips trembling like threatening flames” (251), they pass him by without incident. He hasn’t long escaped, however, for just afterwards another wide-bodied woman—Mary—rescues him from the streets, and becomes his constant, becomes *his only*, company for some time thereafter. Living with Mary, he finds himself in the sort of exclusive mother-child dyad Watson rails against. He describes himself as childish several times while living with her, and in her over-solicitousness, with her presumed intimacy, it is clear she is meant to be conceived as a mother-figure—the sort of black mama ostensibly to be found everywhere in the South, *and* the sort moderns believed everywhere to be found in their Victorian American (read: Boston-centered) past. He says “he had no friends and desired none” (258), but he clearly desires some sort of relief from Mary’s company. His first instinct was in fact to “inwardly reject” (252) her, and living with her invites upon him experiences he would but cannot repel. He complains about her “constant talk of leadership and responsibility” (258), but one senses that what bothers him most is not so much what, specifically, she asks of him—though this clearly does bother him—but her constant pressure, her pressing, her manifest presence, for he is equally disturbed by her “silent” as he is by her audible “pressure” (259) for him to become a race leader. Indeed, he makes his stay with Mary seem a perpetual intake of her in one unpleasant way or another, for he calls attention not only to how agitated her voice makes him feel but to how repulsed he is by the smelly

cabbage meals he feels compelled to eat. (We note she seems to be forever feeding him—never clearly, we note, at his bequest.)

Just as moderns believed the Victorian Titaness inhibited individuation and individualism, the invisible man begins to complain of how he had “lost his direction” (258). After voicing the complaint, he flees Mary’s home, extremely agitated. Unlike, as I will soon explore, his room, the streets outside of Mary’s home cannot quite be imagined as part of her surround. Though when she first met the invisible man on the street near her place, she showed she was telling the truth when she bragged of how “everybody kn[ew] [her] [. . .] around this part of Harlem” (252) by successfully recruiting some men to help her take the invisible man back to her home, and though the streets of Harlem do seem haunted by a presence who would claim its streets—Ras, the Exhorter, who at times, in that he imagines himself someone who is a true “son of Mama Africa” (370), as someone who has not “betray[ed] his own mama” (371), seems the good son who always abides his mother—the streets of Harlem are just as frequently made to seem peopled by those who would forget the past entirely, who would forget all about their irrelevant ancestors and their now fully redundant ways. But he actually finds respite from home after wandering to a part of Harlem situated within downtown. Downtown, we note, is delineated throughout the text as a location, if not quite opposed *to*, certainly clearly differentiated *from*, Harlem; it is for instance the place the Brotherhood relocates him to once his influence

in Harlem had become too strong for their liking.

He considers taking in a movie—but what he actually takes in are a few yams he purchases from a street vender. In that he makes of the purchase a declaration of his intention to not abandon his Southern roots, the purchase seems to move him closer to becoming the person Mary prefers he become. But the reason I think it actually reads more as a repudiation than as an acceptance of her, is that he believes it an act in defiance of those who would have him “do only what was expected of [him]” (266)—that is, an act in defiance of people just like Mary.

After purchasing the yam, after expressing how suddenly empowered and free he feels, he subsequently also expresses a covert desire for matricide. Thinking of Bledsoe, of revenging himself upon him, he imagines him reacting to an accusation as if he had been accused “of raping an old woman of ninety-nine years” (265). Whether or not one agrees that what he is expressing here is his unconscious desire for Mary to be punished for all her stifling attention, the kinds of experiences he has with her are of the sort that moderns believed moved desires for matricide. Douglas writes: “It is the mother’s infernal overattentiveness, her grotesque solicitude, what the feminist critic Madelon Sprengnether calls ‘the threat of castration imminent in her overwhelming love,’ her conviction that her child cannot live in the world without her guidance and pity, her self-serving, self-sanctified efforts to keep her child out of what Sidney Howard called ‘the dangerous place[s],’ where young people

take risks and experience adversity and pain, and perhaps, grow up—it is all this that drives men to matricide, Wertham, [a modern New York psychiatrist] implies” (246).

Mary has certainly been this sort of a mother-figure to the invisible man, almost to the letter. But it should of course seem debatable as to whether or not he is airing here his own desire for matricide, for such a desire, though it must in some way surface, is supposed to be suppressed: the superego will not permit its overt expression, as inhibiting the overt expression of such a betrayal is in fact its principle function. Of course, if he fabricated the next event he participates in there would be no debate as to whether or not he was indulging in thoughts of matricide, but clearly his stumbling upon the eviction of an eighty-nine-year-old woman is *Ralph Ellison's* responsibility, not his own. However, though he says he felt shame in being “witness” to something he “did not wish to see,” he does admit the eviction “fascinated” (Ellison 270) him. And though he isn’t responsible for the violent incident, he hijacks its momentum by associating what was happening to the old woman with what very possibly could happen to Mary, for he identifies her first as “motherly-looking” (267), then as “somebody’s mother,” then as his own mother, and finally—though later, after he has met Jack—as Mary.

He ends up assisting the old woman by speaking to and garnering support from a gathered crowd; and we note that he thereby again looks to be developing into the person Mary wants him to become: just as was true with his eating of the

yams, his oral performance links him to Southern ways. But because he had just described his experience with Mary as “exceedingly irritating,” as it involved constantly listening to her preaching, his opportunity to speak and have others attend to him outside her home, actually works to counter and repudiate uncomfortable past experiences with her. Moreover, because so soon afterwards he finds himself in Jack’s company—that is, along side someone who approved of his action but who wants him to *repudiate* his past, to repudiate *Mary*—it is an action which by itself does not necessary identify him with her.

Jack is the one responsible for construing the eviction of the old woman as “A Death on the City pavements” (290). He is the one who is ostensibly responsible for the invisible man imagining Mary “being ground to bits by New York” (295). The blame’s on him, on somebody else—and this is how moderns would have it too. For he is thereby made to seem the sort of ruthless but also formidable father-figure they hoped would help define their era, help distinguish it from their Victorian predecessors’, help them slay the Victorian Titaness, once and for all. Douglas writes: “Really to kill such a god, to finish her off for good and all, the moderns needed another god; to free themselves from the devouring, engulfing mother god, a savage and masculine god was required, and for this purpose they reinstated the punitive god of their Calvinist forebears, a god operating by inscrutable and malign laws and recast in the image of Calvin’s heir Freud” (Douglas 243).

Douglas goes on to suggest that what the moderns most liked about Freud was his emphasis on, his substantiation of, masculine power. She writes, “[w]hat is apparently at issue in *Totem and Taboo* [—a book, incidentally, she identifies as ‘offer[ing] the tale of the murdered father as a front behind which Freud can accomplish the murder of the mother’ [230]—] [. . .] is male authority and male conflict, male transgression and male retribution” (231). It is a book which “furthers masculine cultural hegemony by hypothesizing the origins of history and religion in an altogether patriarchal story, a world of, to borrow a title from Hemingway, ‘Men Without Women’” (231). As I began by suggesting, Jack can very easily be imagined, particularly at this point of the text, as the Freudian Father. Though obviously he is not intent on keeping Mary “all to himself,” he is evidently another parental-figure who would take the invisible man under his wing, and whose near first instruction is for him to leave her behind.

Jack and the Brotherhood are unwaveringly committed to discouraging him away from Mary. The invisible man now airs few complaints about her, and instead conveys his regret that he would, alas, have to leave her. But he does voice one more: comparing his stay with Mary to his initial involvement with the Brotherhood, he says: “[T]here are many things about people like Mary that I dislike. For one thing, they seldom know where their personalities end and yours begins; they usually think in terms of ‘we’ while I have always tended to think in terms of ‘me’—and that has caused some friction,

even with my own family. Brother Jack and the others talked in terms of ‘we,’ but it was a different, bigger ‘we’” (Ellison 316).

The Brotherhood, though a communist organization, is in its ethos, its manners, strongly reminiscent of New York in the ’20s. As was true of New York then, the Brotherhood is unsentimental and ahistorical: Jack, presenting the Brotherhood’s view of things, says that history necessitates that people such as Mary—hangers-on, that is—need more than just be gradually left behind, but rather pruned away so that they don’t block the emergence of the new. The Brotherhood speaks in precise, “scientific” language; it prefers clear delineation and crispness to soft, feminine verbal blending, making it the perfect embodiment of “urban moderns,” “whose primary ethos” “was accuracy, precision, and perfect pitch and timing” (Douglas 8). Just as it believes words ought to be distinct from one another, just as it clearly differentiates the “woman’s question” from all others, just as it would have the invisible man not confuse the “class struggle with the ass struggle” (Ellison 418), the Brotherhood desires and helps ensure that each of its members have a clearly defined, differentiated, secure space to inhabit.

The Brotherhood offers the invisible man a room to live in. His new room is spacious but not grand, the landlady polite but business-like. He exults in the space, and also delineates it, makes claim to it, identifies with it, in a way he chooses not do with his room at Mary’s. His stay with Mary was never about making claim to a space: it was, rather,

actually all about *resisting* becoming too involved in her own space—the true reason behind his choosing not to concern himself with her affairs. His new apartment is never scene to invasion, and in this it is different from his room at Mary’s. (His office is vulnerable to “invasions,” but we note that when brothers invade his space, he takes pleasure in his repelling them from it.) We sense just how much his room at Mary’s is not so much *his* space but rather part of Mary’s—part of *Mary*—the last day and night he spends there. He describes the experience so that her home becomes all about invasion, permeability, filth and shame—that is, as something to be left behind in great urgency! Noise enters his room, but so too, very nearly, does Mary. She has her hand on his room’s doorknob, and unless he is unclothed she would enter and discover him in an ostensibly shameful act—his breaking of the bank. This minor disaster is worth our attending to, for again it dramatizes just how much Mary inhibits him. He fears Mary might misconceive what happened, resulting in upset and embarrassment. Yet on the street “breaking” (263) the yam showed his disregard for how others saw him, and was an exultant, freeing experience. (We should also consider the breaking the bank a sort of displaced matricide: the bank is of a rotund figure whose sole role is to—hand to mouth—ingest coins, which well captures both his experience of Mary’s neediness and as well all his constant intake of her prepared food—that is, near the entirety of how he experienced his living with her.) He can break the bank, but cannot force a clean break from her: their familiarity with one

another, their casual, familiar discourse, even, inhibits him from effecting a routine tenant-landlord departure—from managing something akin to the evicting police officer’s “just ‘doing [his] [. . .] job, ma’am.”” He aims to pay her back in full, to owe nothing more to her, but she manages to make the one hundred-dollar bill—a bill, whose crispness and large denomination make it seem charmed to ward off “simple” folk like Mary—into another claim upon him: she will now have the resources to take him back whenever he feels the need to return. Again, since her home is at the time associated with swarming cockroaches, oily coffee, cabbage smells, bodily invasion, powerlessness and ineptness, “home will always be there for you” is much more here an affliction than it is in any way a rescuing balm.

Fortunately the Brotherhood is behind him and will not see him go astray. They are the ones who chose his apartment for him, they are the ones who evict him from Harlem when he is becoming too familiar with the people there, they are ones who rescue him when he finds himself confusing the “ass for the class struggle”—that is, when he makes a mash of his handling of the “woman’s question.” And the invisible man makes clear that the Brotherhood will always be there: though he leaves them, they are at the end of his account portrayed as being well in charge of things.

After his stay with her, the nature of his subsequent life shows how the Brotherhood helped him secure a break from Mary, and he never does return to her (though a hole in the ground is to be thanked for this as much as the

Brotherhood). The grotesque last experience with her is fortuitous in that—because it can so readily be encapsulated as “grotesque”—it is made to seem something which can be countered, *en totale*, simply by coating himself in the brand spanking new. The delight he takes in purchasing new clothes—something he does at least twice in the text—also likens him to moderns, for they were all about the new, all about harshly ascribing even the just recently current as but the squallor of yesterday’s news. Moderns liked to believe they were living in a time of momentum in which experiences did not accumulate, build upon one another, but instead were mostly incommensurate—that what once held true “then” could not, would not, hold true now. New clothes identified their wearer as of the moment—distinctly in the clear, that is, from the deadening past and all its tendrils.

The past does prove to linger, though, for *Invisible Man* was actually written in the forties and yet seems still akin in spirit to works written in the '20s. In fact, the ethos of '20s New York more than lingers on today. Popular films continue to dramatize New York as a city whose it's-not-personal masculine ethos matter of factly ruins all maternal claims on striving up-and-comers. Fair to assume, then, that the Matriarch must still be around for the “Brotherhood” to yet remain afoot: apparently, moderns needed, and *we* still need, more than just a new god in place to finish “[H]er off for good.”

Works Cited

- Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Grabbing Hold, for Departure's Sake (April 2006)

Max Vigne makes use of the ostensibly dangerous Himalayan mountain range as if it was a Green World, that is, as a place which facilitates experimentation, self-discovery, and renewal. It's an odd place to use as a playground, but he needed some place that would serve: it is clear that his life in England was safe but routine—hum-drum. It is what was afforded him after a shock—his mother's death—necessitated a life moved by necessity rather than by romance. Though he at first makes it seem as if his surveying position abroad is really about bettering his position at home, not long into the text it becomes apparent that it is really about rediscovering a life of “charm” (22), a life he had been familiar with before his mother died.

But this is not to say, however, that his initial way of characterizing the point of his travels inhibits self-discovery. Instead, very likely, it enables it—for those who've been traumatized by the loss of a parent can be overwhelmed by too much change. Because for them experimentation/play

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

can be as much about the loss of the familiar and comforting as it is about the acquisition of the new and pleasing, it is risky business, to be undertaken with care. Therapists know that the traumatized need first to be made to feel secure before they can be brought to engage with the world experimentally, and Max may have prepared himself for a risky and playful re-evaluation of what he wants to do with his life by first having established himself as a respectable bourgeois Victorian—that is, by constituting himself as the sort of gentleman his own culture would lift up as a good example for other young men to emulate.

His journals entries delineate a sort of threat the Kashmir environment could present him with—namely, becoming lost and freezing to death—and his first action is to make himself feel less vulnerable to this threat. He does this by distinguishing himself from the lost man “found on a mountain that is numbered but still to be named” (17). While the lost man was untethered, unconnected, someone who traveled alone, Max is “attached to a branch, however small and insignificant, of the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India” (17)—is part of confident Victorian expansionism abroad. But he is in fact connected to *two* empowered entities which lend support and security in this new environment. That is, as important to his sense of security as is his attachment to a respectable and grand survey company, is his attachment to his wife at home, who is made to seem so much the suffering angel in the house. Though he attends to the difficulty he experiences in connecting to her through

letters, though our attention is drawn to all he cannot convey to her for fear of frightening her, we should not overlook the fact that *she is* someone he can turn to for attendance and nurturance—*she is* someone he expects will attend closely to whatever she receives from him, to whatever he has to say to her. She writes “mothering” letters to him. His companions laugh at her advice for him to “wear [his] [. . .] woolly vest” (22). But he doesn’t need to deem them—simply jealous—in order to find some comfort in their jabs, for her letter helps establish her as the sort of admonishing but nurturing and empowered mother-figure Victorians believed determined the nature of their public sphere. It helps establish her as the kind of mother-figure we all needed to know we could turn to for periodic support, when we first explored the exciting but strange world we were born into.

The particular nature of his life back home provides him with a secure departure point; he maps for himself a secure arrival point in the future, the end of his journey, which will ostensibly mean a better position at home; and he has linked himself to a company which makes him feel securely placed in the present: there is a sense that he helps make himself feel secure through what might aesthetically feel like the sort of triangulation he attempts to effect for his wife at the end of the text, in an effort to make *her* feel secure. But of course he is on a journey, he is moving; he is never a set, stationary point that can be clearly demarcated on a map. But his movement is made to seem as if it amounts to little more than moving from one secure point to another one well

within sight. He describes his team as tied together. He moves with a “line of men”—“chainmen” (27). This formation makes his movement through the mountains seem rigid and limited, but also delimited—known.

And in some ways this manner of journeying is akin to the one he was already familiar with back home: it follows the beaten path. He travels with men who literally are not trailblazers. They are those who follow paths first established, demarcated, by “the dashing scouts of the triangulating party” (26)—that is, by those who “dig through feet of snow” so as to “expose” “level platforms” and “supporting pillars” (26) for them to stand and step on, by those who are the ones most susceptible to falling victim to insecure snow bridges, to falling into crevasses. The crew Max is associated with “merely” adds “muscle and sinew on their bones” (27). In a sense, though he tells his wife that “[e]verything [he is] [. . .] seeing and doing is so new,” that “so much is rushing into [him] [. . .] all at once [that he] [. . .] gets confused” (26), it is not quite accurate to depict his life abroad as involving constant encounters with the wholly strange and new: in truth, much has been already been processed for him by the brave scouts at the forefront of the party, at the forefront of experiencing an as-of-yet unmapped world.

He encounters his new environment to some extent as a tourist would some place he’d never been to, or as a watcher or reader of a never-before-seen play would experience everything he witnesses within a Green World environment, or as he and his wife encounter their letters to one another,

which they know will be edited so that much of what could frighten has been removed. That is, he encounters “the new” without fear it will shock or disorient. When he tells his wife “that all one’s pleasures [there] [. . .] are retrospective [. . .] [that] in the moment itself, there is only the moment, and the pain” (42), he comes close to universalizing not just how one would experience the Himalayan mountain range but how one might experience any unfamiliar environment. But of course not everyone takes more pleasure from recalled than they do from immediate experience. We note that Annie Dillard’s narrator in *Tinker Creek*, for example, often *exults* in unprocessed, intense, even overwhelming experience. She prefers to look upstream rather than downstream; she prefers to expose herself to the impact of the new rather than situate herself so all lived experience amounts to what has already passed at least someone by—to a perpetual re-encounter with history. And it may be that people who have not learned early on that life could at any moment present them with experiences they are unprepared to deal with, share Dillard’s narrator’s preference for unmediated, unprocessed experience.

Both temporal *and* spatial distance from threats help Max develop a mental state well suited for self-reflection and exploration. The company he travels with can threaten him: Michael is one of three men who make sexual advances upon him. But he rebuffs them; and since this action leads to Michael, at least, “ceas[ing] to deal with him directly,” for him to “communicate [to Max] by sarcastic notes” (30), it

effectively distances them from him and makes their communication something under Max’s control: *he* determines when to read Michael’s letters, and can thereby be sure to be well braced to deal with whatever they might contain. Though even when in a crowded group he still finds ways to create room for himself—he tells us of how he successfully created “the solitude he so desperately need[ed]” through writing to Clara, and of how his reading led him to feel drawn to, closer toward, those whose works he had been reading—clearly he prefers to keep *physically* distant from the rest of his company whenever possible. He manages just this the evening Michael tells a triangulator to tell a tale Max knows could lead to campground disorder. When he guesses things might get out of hand, he “fle[es] the campfire [. . .] and roll[s] himself in a blanket in a hollow, far from everyone, carved into the rocky cliffs” (46). So ensconced, he is safe from whatever carnage developed that evening. And he thereby positions himself so that upon his return he would once again deal only with processed, denatured experience: when he returned to the site in the morning he would encounter only the remains of whatever happened the night before.

We note that by having fled he thereby enabled more play for himself. The next morning offers a surprise: what developed from the evening of story-telling. He hides, and therefore the next morning, can seek! And there is play in another instance in which he creates physical distance between himself and his companions—specifically, the time

he falls into a fissure after having left his companions, who had prematurely set up camp. He escapes the crevice by essentially making himself into a bridge—that is, through play. He admits he actually enjoyed being in the crevice; and given that it meant being physically removed from and to some extent protected against “capture” by a group that annoyed him, we can understand why he found the “cold and quiet” (37) seductive. But he might take pleasure in the incident for another reason: because it staged for him exactly the sort of calamite he feared he was most vulnerable to while journeying and let him know that he *was* in fact capable of handling dangerous situations without aid. Though he eventually will be shamed into deeming this episode not so much something he *shouldn't* write home about but something not *worth* writing home about, it provides him with the sort of experience he can use to make himself feel less the tourist and more a manly adventurer.

It is not quite accurate to say he relied only on his own resources to emerge from the crevasse, though, for we are told that “it was the thought of not getting to read” his wife’s letters which inspired his efforts. It is, then, an incident which shows how strongly he needs to think of his wife as someone he *must* return to, as someone to draw strength from. But it is also one which speeds up his reliance upon, his attachment to, other people. His next letter is moved by his enthusiasm to tell her about his developing letter relationship with Dr. Hooker, and to inform her of how drawn he is to men such as Darwin, Gray, and Hooker. It is one where he tells her he

“plans to share his records with Dr. Hooker and however else is interested” (42). We note that when he first mentioned receiving a letter from Dr. Hooker he made contact with him seem akin to his seeing K2 for the first time. That is, he made it seem akin to what a tourist would feel upon closing upon greatness: it enraptures, but does not obligate—it could forever after be an encounter he might dazzle others with but which doesn’t necessitate any soul-shifting on his part in any substantive way. When he first describes his renewed interest in botany to his wife, he makes it seem something which would enhance but not “deform,” harshly alter, their life together upon his return; it will simply allow him to point out more things to her in their garden. But in this letter it is evident that his involvement with Hooker, and his rediscovery of his interest in botany, will involve distancing, not closing, the distance between his wife and himself.

At the end of the text we are told of Max’s need to prepare his wife to accept difficult truths, and he shows the need to slowly prepare himself for as much as well. When he first mentioned great personages he is or is becoming connected to, such as Hooker or his relation Godfrey Vigne, he made their connection to him seem indirect and inconsequential. He actually says that he is (only) “tangentially” (20) related to Vigne: he tells himself there is no direct, pressing link between them. When he mentions Hooker’s letters to him, he identifies them as an effort of Hooker’s “to encourage an amateur” (40)—that is, he chooses to believe that Hooker writes to him more out of

kindness than out of respect for the work he had undertaken. But though from such statements of his as, "What draws me to these men and their writings is not simply their ideas but the way they defend each other so vigorously and are so firmly bound" (40), it is clear that though he looks to these men as those he might bind himself to, he is not yet prepared to make firm the link. But he is preparing himself, constructing "bones" upon which, after he comes to believe that he is in fact worthy of sustained communication with Hooker and/or of identifying himself more squarely with his great relation, "muscle" and "sinew" can be added later.

He more boldly characterizes himself to seem more similar than dissimilar to these men—and different from his wife—after he re-establishes a link to his childhood life, to his mother. He becomes fully aware of the continued existence and relevance of this link after his fall into the crevasse. After that experience, he writes, "He himself has changed so much he grows further daily from her [i.e., his wife's] picture of him. It is his mother, dead so many years, who seems to speak most truly to the new person he is becoming. As if the years between her death and now are only a detour, his childhood self emerging from a long uneasy sleep" (48). Did the landscape somehow help consolidate his attachment to his past life? There is reason to believe so, for he fell into the crevasse after wandering through an environment that made him feel as if he was stepping backwards through time. And he admitted his desire to sleep, perhaps to hibernate, while enclosed within snow at the bottom of the crevasse. Though,

then, his wife helped extricate him from the crevice, he emerged someone prepared to believe his life with her but a long detour, to make himself feel more awkwardly related *to her* than to greats like Godfrey Vigne.

His wife is made to seem a kind of useful object. In a Winnicotian sense, she is the primary object to be left behind *only once* the venturing "child" has securely attached himself to transitional ones. She is someone who must be construed as good and pure, as someone he desperately wants to map his soul for, as someone to return to, until he feels less in need of her support and love. After he has revived and reattached himself to his early childhood self, and after he has begun to link and identify himself more and more with Hooker, he is prepared to admit to himself that his previous home is not something he is actually all that eager to return to. Initially he said that both he and his wife decided he should go abroad, even though it was clear the decision was mostly his own. Initially his complaint about being away from her was that he was unable to keep in constant contact, to provide her with a well-documented map of his soul. Now we hear of him choosing not to write to her for months at a time. His experience with Dima is something he uses to help him reassess his time with her. He compares her to his wife, and, as he witnesses Dima's charm fade away, admits that much of his life with his wife lacked charm: it lacked precisely what he knew along side his mother as a child and what seems newly available to him should he continue to add to his already established relationship with professional botanists.

He leaves Dima behind, but his attachment to her facilitated his peers' acceptance of him. It lends him some of the mystique men such as Dr. Chateau, of those who have been in the mountains for decades doing—*who knows what?*, possess. It lends him some of the mystique his relation Godfrey possessed. Fitting more naturally to his new environment, he begins to distance himself from terminology, ways of thinking, he had adopted earlier. We are told, "Nobility, duty, sacrifice—whose words are those? Not his. He is using them to screen himself from the knowledge of whatever is shifting in him" (54). He may well have used them, however, to enable such shifting to occur in the first place, for they too made him seem to embody, to partake in, a buoyant Victorian ethos. We note, though, that he describes himself as morosely beginning to doubt the real benefits and righteousness of Victorian expansionism. But he may be beginning to doubt the rightness of efforts by those such as Hooker he had previously hero-worshipped, because he is better prepared to detach from them as well.

That is, when he begins to doubt the legitimacy, the righteousness of his mapping efforts, he has become a skilled draftsman who has learned through trial and error how to articulate his environment through maps and notes, and an adventurer, who has successfully lead men through mountains. He is no longer an amateur. He has demonstrated to himself that he is worthy of the attention of people like Hooker. But perhaps, because not adjusting his estimations of Hooker and Godfrey would entail an obligation to continue

becoming like them, would limit his freedom, his ability to establish his own future, he now cooperates in making them seem less worthy of his loyalty. Time has come for him to leave even more behind him, to forage on ahead, a true trailblazer—now no mere servant of the map.

Work Cited

Barrett, Andrea. *Servants of the Map: Stories*. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.

Moderns and their Mothers' Reach (May 2006)

In *Terrible Honesty*, Ann Douglas argues that moderns felt they needed to find a way to free themselves from the influence, from the control, of their Victorian predecessors, and discusses how their cultural products were means to this end. Free, they created one of the richest cultural periods of all time. But she also argues that moderns well knew that a price would have to be paid for all this self-fulfillment and self-growth. She writes that they knew that at some point the Maternal—the “object” they repressed and beat back—would stage a return and make them pay for their insolence. Some theorists—notably those influenced by object-relations’ thought—argue, however, that how most of us experience our own self-growth and freedom ensures that moderns would *themselves* stage the return to a matriarchal environment—that is, that she wouldn’t need to return, for *they* would feel compelled to pay her a visit. In this essay I will argue that prominent modernist plays served to both help effect the matricide Douglas argues modernist cultural

DRAINING THE AMAZON’S SWAMP

products produced, and to provide means to temporarily vicariously return to the maternal environment moderns so loathed and feared. Specifically, I will explore how Brick and Margaret in Tennessee Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and Biff in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, are made to seem empowered moderns who exist outside of a maternal environment, but who risk upon their return to it the loss of their hard-won independence.

Douglas makes a very bold argument in *Terrible Honesty*. She more than argues that modern New York effected cultural matricide, that it warred against mothers and everything maternal—she argues that *modernism itself* was mostly a weapon used in the fight. According to Douglas, moderns preferred, for instance, crisp, precise, straightforward prose that “cut through all the bull,” because it was a prose style opposed to that preferred by Victorian matrons—because it was deemed non-matronly. She believes that moderns were at war against leading matrons of (American) Victorian society, who—according to them, at least—made use of everybody around them, of their children, especially, to service their own needs. She acknowledges that moderns’ successful effort to create a vital, original culture depended on them feeling as if they had, if not slain Her, at least beat back the Victorian Titaness enough to create room for their own growth, but she cannot fathom—why such a strong need to war against those already deceased before any of them were even born?

Given how she familiarizes us with the difficulties key

moderns had with their mothers, given her arguing that *the entirety of Hemingway's opus* should be understood as his revenging himself upon his own (222), it is odd Douglas doesn't consider that they warred primarily with *them*, rather than with Victorian matrons. She chooses to conflate John Watson's—the most prominent 20s child psychologist—observations concerning how mothers “attend” to their children and the effect this attendance has upon them, into her larger argument that moderns were at war against the Victorian epoch. But if for many children Watson's belief that mothers as much harm as help their children is in fact an *accurate* assessment of their influence upon them, we have reason to believe that moderns needed to make use of whatever handy, of whatever they might produce, to help cope with difficulties arising from efforts to extricate themselves from their control.

According to Ann Hulbert, Watson should be counted amongst a host of child experts in the modern era who believed mothers used their children to satisfy their own unmet needs (*Raising America* 141). He observed that mothers tend to over-handle their children, kiss them obsessively, “stroke[e] and touch [their] [. . .] skin, lips, sex organs and the like,” and argues that no one should “mistake it for an innocent pastime” (141). In short, he argues that mothers made incestuous use of their children. He argues that children must be kept in separate beds, separate rooms, else suffer the inevitable results of being over-handled (Douglas 43)—debilitation: the child would thereafter have difficulty leaving

behind his/her “nesting habits,” and would therefore be unlikely to be able to “conquer the difficulties it must meet in its environment” (141).

Watson's view of mothers is, we note, about polar opposite the popular Victorian one—nowhere in his writings is one to find a conception of mothers as angels. That is, in his conception of them, mothers are not those who despite all ills somehow still provide moral guidance, while sustaining the warm hearth. Rather, as noted, he understands them as near compelled to make use of their children in some effort to cheer up themselves. His account of mothers should fit very well with those who argue that most women through time (and still today) have been insufficiently nurtured and respected by the societies they grew up in. That is, it should fit well with those who argue that most women grow up in patriarchal societies—societies, that is, which to a lesser or greater extent set up their female members as suspect, and treat them accordingly. Patriarchy's effect on encumbering or debilitating female self-esteem is hardly something mother-hating Watson can be imagined concerning himself about, but it is something psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause, a contemporary independent scholar whose conclusions on the effects of mothers' incestuous handling of their children to some extent mirror Watsons', *is* very much interested in. He writes:

[I]mmature mothers and fathers [,that is, mothers and fathers who themselves were not reacted to warmly,

affectionately by their own parents] expect their child to give them the love they missed when they were children, and therefore experience the child's independence as rejection. Mothers in particular have had extremely traumatic developmental histories throughout history; one cannot severely neglect and abuse little girls and expect them to magically turn into good mothers when they grow up. [. . .] The moment the infant needs something or turns away from her to explore the world, it triggers her own memories of maternal rejection. When the infant cries, the immature mother hears her mother, her father, her siblings, and her spouse screaming at her. She then "accuses the infant of being unaffectionate, unrewarding and selfish . . . as not interested in me" [Brazelton and Cramer 11]. All growth and individuation by the child is therefore experienced as rejection. "When the mother cannot tolerate the child's being a separate person with her own personality and needs, and demands instead that the child mirror her, separation becomes heavily tinged with basic terror for the child" [255]. (DeMause, *The Emotional Life of Nations* 151)

DeMause argues that since we cannot help but grow in life, that "fears of growth, individuation, and self-assertion that carry threatening feelings of disintegration lead to desires to merge with the omnipotent mother—literally to crawl back

into the womb" (94). These feelings of disintegration arise owing to our belief that we will be, that we *deserve* to be, punished for our growth. Throughout our life we are drawn to make a return to our mothers; but reunion also returns upon us all the troubling feelings that necessitated our leaving her behind in the first place. He writes, "fears of growth, individuation and self assertion that carry threatening feelings of disintegration lead to desires to merge with the omnipotent mother, literally to crawl back into the womb, desires which immediately turn into fears of maternal engulfment, since the merging would involve total loss of the self" (94).

DeMause clearly does not believe we return to our *actual* mothers when we experience feelings of growth panic. His interest is in the social sphere, in how, when we feel the need to stage a return to the maternal, we construe our social sphere so that it helps us feel as if we are back within a maternal environment. If he is right in this, moderns, suffering from growth panic and its associated fears of self-disintegration, and feeling the need not only to slay the maternal "beast" but to return to her, may then have used their theaters—with their womb-like surrounds—and their plays—with their involving transports to potentially hyper-real, less distilled, "truer" worlds—for such a purpose, as they provided ideal venues for this quintessential drama to take place. They may have gone to plays like Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, that is, not actually so much for their professed reasons, but more to facilitate their vicarious return to a maternal

environment to witness the mother-returned brought back down to size.

Before delineating how in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy's home is actually made to seem a symbiotic, maternal space, lorded over throughout much of the play (especially in the first two acts, but also to some extent in the third) by Big Mama, there is something significant to be said about the particular nature of our likely avatars—Brick and Margaret—who have ventured into it. Though the study of reader immersion in texts has “not been particularly popular with the ‘textual’ brands of literary theory” (15) as “it conflicts with [‘their’] [. . .] concept of language” (92), reader-response theorists and cognitive psychologists who study readers’ involvement in texts generally agree that reading involves the reader (or audience member) in creating a world that “stretch[es] in space, exist[s] in time” (Gerrig 15). The cognitive psychologist Richard Gerrig argues that the text actually “serve[s] as [a] habitat” (15) for the reader, that readers are “placed” within the text as “side-participants or overhearers” (119). He does not believe that “transportation into a narrative world is dependent on narrative skills” (95); but he does believe it depends on how well we identify with the principal protagonists. If Douglas is correct in her characterization of moderns, it seems likely that they would appreciate Brick and Margaret as near kin. Both are loners: Brick shies away from physical contact, from any kind of intimate involvement in pursuit of the “click” that promises complete detachment, and Margaret imagines herself a cat

bent on her own self-interest. And if they were making use of the play to engage a threatening maternal environment, moderns would be pleased that both protagonists seem appropriately equipped for use as avatars. Brick's name suggests he is all-protected, that he is, with his detachment, with his sense of himself as entirely—as *already*—defeated, impervious to further debilitation. He *is* in fact mostly walled against the world, but not completely so. However, as I will explore, the fact that he has a weak spot, that he requires a click before he feels safe, may in the end empower him, for it makes him seem a natural complement to Margaret, the stronger of the two, the one particularly well empowered against incorporation within the maternal surround. Margaret is made to seem akin to a weapon—specifically, to an archer's bow. She is likened to Diana, Greek goddess of the hunt. And though Henry Popkin is surely right to see Brick—who is likened to a “godlike being” and to “Greek legends” (43)—as akin to the Greek hero Adonis, the handsome athlete (“Plays of Tennessee Williams” 45), he may also, with his one weak spot, be fairly likened to Achilles as well. That is, he might fairly be imagined a man-god whose one weak spot happens to be one the goddess of the hunt would be expected to spot and effectively strike.

He, then, is a barrier, resistant to influences, *she*—an object that punctures through them. Both should prove problematic for an environment that would remove from them their sense of themselves as individuals. We note this is *the* threat, according to Watson and object relations-oriented

researchers such as DeMause, the mother confronts her children with, and it is *the* threat Margaret obsesses over in act one. She is set on social climbing, on not falling from her current place on the social ladder into waste. In an effort to make herself feel secure, she declares just how different she is from those she deems well off the ladder—one of these being Gooper's wife, Mae, whom she claims belongs not above but rather along side the odious, base human lot. Specifically, she deems Mae someone who serves their (i.e., base humanity's) needs, whose beauty and body is at their service. She depicts her as the carnival queen who must "smil[e], bow, and blow kisses to all the trash in the street" (21). And also as a breeder—she uses the fact that Mae has given birth to five children already with at least one more on the way, to make her seem as responsible as any for gross societal overflow and numbing lack of distinction. She also distinguishes herself from Mae's children, repeatedly calling them "no-neck monsters." They're monsters, demons of appetite, for lacking the neck needed to claim some distinction for the potentially determining head. She insists that Mae gave them dog names, and intending through cruel intent not to make them seem of the same team but simply of different castes, imagines them a pack she might use in a hunt. She leads; they would follow. *She*, a goddess; *they*—pack animals. She differentiates herself from them once again, and most effectively, when she likens herself to a cat, for unlike dogs, cats can't be conjoined within a pack, and unlike Mae, the carnival queen, their claim on the aristocratic is intrinsic not farcical.

We note, though, that in act one neither Brick nor Margaret is made to seem comfortably empowered over those around them; instead, they find themselves hard-pressed to fend off invasions. Though Brick's susceptibility to Margaret will end up helping him feel protected, in act one Margaret's ability to upset him actually makes him seem vulnerable. And Margaret's ability to strike, deflect, dodge, and wound is put to test in the first act as well; and ultimately she too ends up seeming someone more at risk of being used than someone who'll end up managing everyone to her own advantage. Brick and Margaret have to deal with invaders: first, the no-neck monsters, whose screams permeate their room, and then Big Mama, who authoritatively encroaches upon what is ostensibly only fairly mostly their own turf—their bedroom. Margaret's first line in the play, "One of those no-neck monsters hit me with a hot buttered biscuit so I have t'change" (15), foreshadows her subsequent difficulties in dealing with encroachments throughout the act. Soon afterwards she comments on their "screaming" (16). The children scream twice in the first act, and count amongst the numerous unwelcome noises that assault the room. The children's screams, Mae's footsteps, Big Mama's booming voice, the phone's ring, croquet sounds—all encroach upon and also call into question their claim to privacy. We are made to understand that, though they have their own bedroom, they are hardly distinguished from the goings-on in the rest of the home.

Their bedroom's walls aren't much of a barrier, and

neither is its door. Though Mae asks if she may enter their room, Big Mama attempts entry without asking permission, and is irritated to find herself refused by their lock. Before she finds an alternative entry, Brick retreats to the bathroom, shuts its door, and leaves it to Margaret to deal with her. Margaret tries to assert herself while talking to her, but cannot rebuke her. By entering unexpectedly through a different—the gallery—door, Big Mama catches Margaret by surprise. Big Mama's loud voice, too, "startle[s]" (33) and unnerves her. Margaret tries to persuade Big Mama there is a need for privacy in a home, but Big Mama replies, "No, ma'am, not in *my* house" (33). She would advance upon her son, even though Margaret told her Brick was dressing. But seeing her adult son's naked body is not something to balk her; she argues that she has seen him so countless times before, and clearly understands passage into adulthood more as a test of the familial bond than as confirmation for its rescinding—she for example is driven throughout the play to subject her son to the sort of "kiss[ing] and [. . .] fuss[ing] over" (50) she subjected him to as a child and well knows he cannot stand. She is however more than willing to show others her own bare body: she lifts up her skirt so that Margaret her see bruises, something she hopes makes clear that *she*, not Margaret, is the one still so functioning within a comfort zone that she can boast arrogant, blaisé authority even while within "their" bedroom. Even *there*, it is still most honest if she acts and says as she pleases, very much to the extent of degrading insult: she suggests to Margaret that she

(i.e., Margaret) is without child because she can't please in bed; an affront that clearly fazes Margaret.

Big Mama is not successful in her effort to retrieve her son—but Margaret is not responsible for her departure. Instead, someone calls her, and in a proprietary fashion she "swe[eps]" (37) out of the room herself. And by slamming the door shut on the way out, she loudly conveys her irritation at their efforts to balk her. Only after she has left does Brick exit the bathroom. He actually "hobble[s]" (37) out, an act we likely cannot but compare to Big Mama's emboldened exit, and understand as just how right she is concerning her strong stretch over her household.

Big Mama's subsequent entrance into a room, which occurs immediately after the intermission at the beginning of act two, proves even more brazen and assertive. We are told that "instant silence [is] [. . .] almost instantly broken by the shouting charge of Big Mama, entering through hall door like a charging rhino" (49). We are also subsequently told that her dress, "her riotous voice, booming laugh, have dominated the room since she entered" (50). She is characterized as a maternal-figure intent on enveloping other people within her enormous body. She is again looking for Brick, to smother him with attention, but instead ends up subjecting the Reverend Tooker to the sort of overwhelming close contact she'd prefer to lavish on her son. She pulls the reverend close to her, "into her lap," and exclaims in a shrill laugh—"[e]ver seen a preacher in a fat lady's lap?" (51). Indeed, as nerve-racking as the first act must have been for matron-weary

moderns, the second must have proved even worse. But soon enough—welcome respite: Big Daddy, believing himself free of cancer, decides it's time *somebody* put an end to her influence.

According to Douglas moderns understood the great matriarchs of the Victorian period as Titanesses. She writes that they felt the need to create a god equal in power to the Victorian Titaness, a male god, capable of defeating her. Specifically, she writes: "Really to kill such a god, to finish her off for good and all, the moderns needed another god; to free themselves from the devouring, engulfing mother god, a savage and masculine god was required" (243). She believes Freud's (conception of the) Father, for instance, was readily embraced by moderns because of Freud's sense of Him as inherently more dangerous than the Mother. While Freud enabled the Father through fact, artists did so through fiction; and given the way he is portrayed, Big Daddy is himself such an artistic construction, for he rudely manages to tame the maternal-figure Big Mama, who had been near unopposed, was expanding, and looked unstoppable.

Though with the size of his girth it seems absurd he does so, Big Daddy is one of two characters in the play (the other being Margaret) that rails against reckless expansion. Thinking of Mae's sixth child, Big Daddy complains that once one obtains property how soon "things [. . .] [get] completely out of hand!" (61). He responds to Brick's conjecture that "nature hates a vacuum," by arguing that "a vacuum is a hell of a lot better than some of the stuff that nature replaces it

with" (61). He is set to inhibit Big Mama's dominance over the household, her presumptive management of all he understands his own. In a rant he rails not only against her household reign but against her presumptuous use of her body, saying:

I went through all that laboratory and operation and all just so I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it turns out that I am and you ain't—and that's my birthday present—and my cake and champagne!—because for three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made! I made this place! [. . .] [A]nd now you think you're just about to take over. Well I am just about to tell you that you are not just about to take over. (58)

Big Daddy's bullying of his wife to some extent means the end of her dominance through the remainder of act two, but he loses his self-confidence and largely vanishes from the play once he learns he actually does have cancer. And with his absence, Big Mama returns to prior form. In act three, and after Big Daddy's declaration that the house is nobody's but his own, she shows she still believes otherwise. She says, "*I said, husband!* I won't tolerate anymore catty talk in my house" (114), and says the equivalent several more times through the remainder of the act. She returns to advancing upon Brick, to physically pressing upon him. We are told that she

approaches her son, puts her hands through his hair, ruminates about what he was like when he was a boy, and Brick backs away as “he does from all physical contact” (117). She then insists that they “all got to love each other an’ stay together, all of us, just as close as we can, especially now that such a black thing has come and moved into [their] [. . .] place without invitation” (117).

But if Big Daddy’s attempt at matricide was insufficient, incomplete, Big Mama is still too shaken by what might have seemed both to her and to the audience like another act of matricide—namely, the family’s convergence on her to inform her of the bad news—to be capable of all she managed before. Big Mama has had her time and now *Margaret* is the one who will impose herself on everyone else. She takes advantage of Big Mama’s lapse to make full claim to Brick. Margaret is ideally suited for such a purpose, for Big Mama actually sees Margaret as an “other”: not part of her brood, she is alien, an outsider. The text actually primes us to imagine her as existing outside the household while still within it. She is a cat who dances on a roof; and also Diana, goddess not only of the hunt but of the moon, an object Brick focuses on in the third act in hopes of distancing himself from the household’s goings-on.

Brick looks to the moon for escape, and at the end of the play he wants Margaret to look over him for the same reason. Sex with her, we note, would involve none of the closeness that so repels him. She says he will satisfy her desires, but we know this is best done when he is detached and uninvolved.

In act one, that is, she declared that he was “[s]uch a wonderful person to go to bed with, [. . .] mostly because [he was] [. . .] really indifferent to it” (24). Maggie, too, we note, is singular and alone. There is a sense that their love-making would be very different from the kind Big Daddy “enjoyed” with Big Mama. For though Big Daddy declares he only “humped” his wife, he believes that forty years of such humping left him drained, depleted, in need of revitalization; conversely, sex between Brick and Margaret will be kept to a minimum. And though at the end of the play we know she will become a mother, it is very unlikely we imagine Margaret as at all maternal. She is shown to loathe young children, in fact, and very likely strikes us as the sort of mother Watson argued children ought to have—specifically, one who would give her child the bare minimum of attention before absconding off elsewhere in a fickle, cat-like fashion.

Another play that served moderns’ need to stage a return to a maternal environment and effect matricide is Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. The plot involves Biff being summoned home by his mother so he might help her with her failing, fraying husband, Willy. Willy’s begrudged before a hundred different villains, but like Big Daddy, his foremost problem is his wife. Big Daddy argues that his wife had slowly taken over, and that forty years of living with her had been a lifetime of living with someone he loathed. He declares he will not be servile to her, but even though he does to some extent beat her back—feeling newly refreshed and ascendant for having done so—he still mentions to Brick that they

should keep their voices down for fear of being overheard: that is, there is perhaps *never* a sense in the play that the house he lives in is some kind of manor, ranged over by its lord. Willy may be thought of as someone who, owing to the fact that he could not ignore his wife's wishes and commit to leaving Brooklyn, found himself trapped within a space managed by her, a munchkin in the home, sport for everything else each time he stepped outside it. Like Big Daddy, within the house he huffs and puffs, he efforts to be proprietary, in a loud and bullying manner, but this just shows how pathetic he's become.

Because he proved someone who could not get away to some place better suited to him, Willy spends a life perpetually fending off threats, threats enfranchised for grabbing at him while remaining in their own element. While in discussion with Bernard, he voices his suspicion that his real problem, his tragic flaw, is that he cannot escape. He believes that a moment was once presented him where he might embrace a more manly life, but in failing to take advantage of this opportunity he doomed himself to being walled-in for life. He plays back in his mind the moment his brother Ben offered him Freedom—that is, when Ben offered him a chance to join him in Alaska. Ben had gone there, we note, in search of his father. Linda finally persuades Willy he would be better off not leaving, in choosing, instead, to continue on as a salesman, but it seems clear that Linda had her own interests in mind here, and was really working him into relapse. She found contentment in the stable life,

and sought its continuation. And in her convincing him to remain, she emasculates him, makes him a victim of *her own* accomplishments.

Willy, then, fails to leave behind a life his wife finds comfortable in pursuit of a life that *he*, rather, would enjoy. He is, then, the sort of pathetic figure moderns feared they might become unless they made their culture wholly inhospitable to matriarchs. As discussed, they managed this by sustaining and legitimizing theories and cultural products that made the Father seem empowered. But they also did so by making *themselves* seem the sort mothers could not readily be imagined being able to handle, and would in fact likely fear. If her conception of moderns is correct, they must have readily identified with Biff, someone who in his youth, we note, mothers feared (40), and who, unlike his father, found means to leave his old life behind.

Like Brick and Margaret, then, Biff has some ability, some power, which would encourage moderns to use him as a proxy. But just as Brick upon his return to his old home seems at genuine risk of once again being subject to his mother's plans for him, Biff too is at risk of being caught (out). Linda would have Biff rescue Willy, but as Christopher Bigsby argues, "[t]he price of saving Willy may [. . .] be the loss of his own freedom and autonomy" (*Arthur Miller* 104). As with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the play begins with the mother as highly reckon-worthy. Though there is never a point in the play in which Willy's interrupting her makes her seem weak (for the most part it works to make her seem very tolerant—

and therefore also *surely* more than fully justified in whatever demands she might insist on him), at this point of the play her own interruptions make her seem commandant. She commands the stage, she commands her sons—and also very effectively makes them feel guilty for their not attending to their father. And so Biff decides that he even though he “hate[s] this city [. . .] [.] [he’ll] stay” (58) and help out.

The means for Biff’s escape from a life he really wants no part of to some extent mirrors that used by moderns to empower their resistance to Victorian morality. According to Douglas, moderns came to understand Victorian morality as built of a shallow appreciation of life’s true variegatedness, and therefore also as discardable. She writes that they did not detach themselves from the responsibility of doing right, but rather had come to understand that “doing right” is a more complicated and sometimes counterintuitive business than their predecessors had assumed. Specifically, she writes: “The older generation was quick to accuse the younger one of lacking moral standards, but in truth the moderns wanted not fewer ethics but more searching ones” (33). Linda manages to control Biff by suggesting that abiding by her simple request (to stay and help save Willy) is the right thing for him to do. But just like moderns learned to be less intimidated, less impressed, by conventional morality, Biff finds way to not let his mother’s sense of what is right triumph over his own. At the end of the play he would confront his father and tell him, amongst other things, that he intends to once again live the life *he* wants to lead. He intends to bust through the lies he

feels have cloaked and smothered their household all of their lives. Believing him instead intent on more cruelty, Linda tries to dissuade him. Much like before when she denigrated her children for their “inappropriate” behavior, she calls them “animals” and “louses” (124). But while before calling Happy a “bum” and accusing Biff of being selfish and uncaring, helped tame them, Biff is not here deterred. Rather, he casually accepts her brutal characterizations of him as true, apparently grants that he surely is “scum of the earth,” but knowing that doing what is *actually* right for his father will *inevitably* suffer her condemnation, still presses on “with absolute assurance” (125).

We note that this sense of Biff as an ultimately disregarding, merciless truth-teller is exactly how Douglas argues moderns preferred to imagine themselves. She argues they “[o]pposed every form of ‘sentimentality,’ they prided themselves on facing facts, the harder the better” (33). Their understanding was that since they sought out the kinds of unsettling truths Victorians at-all-cost avoided, they were their superiors, with no real warrant to look to them for guidance. Biff, as he makes his way past Linda, certainly seems the stronger of the two. His concern to hash it out with Willy makes him once again seem as manly as Texas—it makes him seem someone we readily believe had as a youth frightened the holy dickens out of moms. Linda believes Biff could only succeed in hurting Willy in his confronting him, but in fact the confrontation revives him—only not in a way Linda would delight in. She hoped Biff would help save

Willy's life, keep him, his habitual way of living, afloat. But Willy understood this life as insufficiently masculine, as cowardly, even, and we note that *Linda herself* thought it sufficiently hampered that she could without pause proclaim him "not great," someone who, when things went awry, went about "a little boat looking for a harbor" (76). Biff helps make his father feel great again, as he did previously in his youth with his athletic accomplishments and his clear admiration for him. Their confrontation shows Willy the extent to which his son still cares about him, something he had been unsure of for some time. Biff, then, is a relative from afar who offers him great joy—and he clearly does imagine this visit as akin to the one Ben once paid him. Emboldened, he imagines Ben once again by his side, and persuades himself that one last opportunity still remains to demonstrate he is in fact a provider, a doer, a risk-taker—a real man. Bigsby writes that "Linda trumpets the fact that they have repaid their mortgage as if this was in some way the objective towards which their lives had been directed" (103), and it certainly does seem Linda's key objective. But it was one Willy never saw realized, for he died before the last payment on the house was made—Linda actually says at the funeral, "we were *just about* free and clear" (103; emphasis added). The play ends with the two seeming very disparate: not only is Linda alive and Willy deceased, she is left thinking he died just *before* freedom would come to his rescue.

Willy escapes her understanding and her grasp, and so too Biff: we know he will once again live the life he wants to

lead. Just as with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the play ends by making characters moderns likely identified with in the ascendant, and their feared predecessor—the matriarch—depleted, disparaged, disposed. Both plays, then, are ideally fabricated to help produce the merciless displacement of predecessors Douglas argues moderns' cultural products were actually mostly intended for. But given the extent to which the matriarch in each of these plays is allowed room to range, perhaps they also worked to satisfy a need their freedom and growth ended up empowering—namely, to revisit and re-experience maternal power so potent it could command from you your obeisance and cause more than the errant miss-step in your ongoing efforts to live your own life.

Works Cited

- Bigsby, Christopher. *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.
- Bliquex, Geurin. "Linda's Role in Death of a Salesman." *Modern Drama* 10 (1968): 383-86. Print.
- DeMause, Lloyd. *The Emotional Life of Nations*. New York: Karnac, 2002. Print.
- Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. Print.
- Gerrig, Richard J. *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993. Print.
- Hashbarger, Karl. *The Burning Jungle: An Analysis of Arthur*

Miller's Death of a Salesman. Washington: University Press of America, 1979. Print.

Hulbert, Ann. *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice About Children*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Print.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Viking, 1967. Print.

Popkin, Henry. "Plays of Tennessee Williams." *Tulane Drama Review* 4.3 (March 1960): 45-64. Print.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.

Williams, Tennessee. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. New York: Signet, 1955. Print.

How Insensitive! (July 2006)

Historians once assumed that the termination of the slave trade showed that Britons are—or at least can be—a genuinely sensitive people. That is, they didn't understand eighteenth-century sensibility as a culture, a phenomenon, a cult. Things have changed, however, for outside of popular history little history is being done these days where sensibility is taken at face value. In this exploration of how historians are currently characterizing mid-to-late eighteenth-century abolitionists and their ostensibly sensitive audience, I suggest that historians now prefer to characterize them, not as bad, but as calculating and self-interested. But if the current preferred conception of the sensible "man of feeling" is as either a rational man or a man of artifice, there are murmurs arising from current research into pornography and abolitionist literature which suggest that he is in the process of becoming understood, rather, as perverse, lecherous—as a subject worthy neither of admiration nor of dispassionate assessment, but simply of scorn.

Contemporary historians generally identify mid-to-late eighteenth-century “men [and women] of feeling”—those who would fashion and/or read and/ enthusiastically respond to philanthropic causes—as people who saw in (the fashion of) sensibility, means to improve their status in society. Though it is true that in his well-known “The Birth of Sensibility,” Paul Langford identifies sensibility as a cultural phenomenon which helped stabilize British society by working against deism and by improving the over-all wealth of the British nation, he presents sensibility primarily as a tool with which the middle class empowered itself vis-à-vis the upper class. According to Langford, in an era which prized money and property, gentility was the ultimate prize. And to be genteel in an age of sensibility you needn’t be aristocratic; indeed, since the court was seen as artificial, it could count against you. So long as you had wealth, property, and could demonstrate successfully both to yourself and to others that you truly sympathized with the suffering of others, you could be counted amongst the genteel.

Langford’s conception of sensibility as the means by which self-righteousness and social position was rooted fits very well with the conception of the sensitive offered by other prominent contemporary historians of British society such as Anne Mellor, Linda Colley, and Barker-Benfield. These historians often characterize sensibility as a tool used intentionally for purposes of self-empowerment and satisfaction. Those who saw themselves as sensible were not, then, as they preferred to imagine themselves as, as free of

artifice— “natural;” indeed, Langford explicitly states that “naturalism was a cover for ever more contrived artifice” (477). Sentiment, he argues, was fundamentally about the individual and his/her own feelings (481). It was something fundamentally about one’s *own* needs, not those of others. He argues that such a conception of sentiment was recognized (by whom, Langford does not explain) as “dangerous” (481), but was “rendered useful” (481) by making it ostensibly about others, about attending and giving to others in need (the transformation of “sentiment” to “sensibility”). Sentiment needed to be directed, but could ostensibly have been directed near anywhere and serve its primary purpose of self-empowerment and self-validation on the part of the sensible.

Brycchan Carey’s “Read this and Blush” argues that abolitionists and slavery apologists at the time actually saw sensibility as a movement which needn’t necessarily have been directed towards ending the slave trade. But before exploring Carey’s article and how it too presents us with a conception of the sensible which is typical but (perhaps) in the process of becoming highly contestable, I will note that though Langford’s article attempts a general overview of the culture of sensibility, though it offers no examination of primary material, it still advances a conception of men and women of feeling that can in my judgment convince simply because it offers one contemporary historians are eager to accept. Though the current trend in historiography is strongly against seeing historical subjects as beneficent, it does not lean towards imagining them as evil or amoral. Instead, the

expectation is that in any cultural era one will find people who are more or less the same as in any other. Cultures vary drastically, but (ostensibly) not so a people's essential nature (Barker-Benfield, referring to Norbert Elias psychoanalytic study of cultural development, actually argues that people *do* change—but not that they improve). Langford's subjects are far more self-interested than they are selfless, but they are not bad people: he thus offers the preferred (by historians) conception of people as neither heroic nor horrific. Though he writes that "abolition takes its place among the manifold expressions of the new sensibility" (516), and thereby makes abolition seem simply one of many means by which the fashionable engaged in the latest fashion—"sensibility," he also writes that true "sensitivity to the plight" (505) of others arose from increased awareness of their suffering. Sensibility *is* to Langford (as it is to most historians of English culture) integral to the humanitarian movement, but not only or primarily such.

Like Langford, Carey is another historian who offers a sense of the eighteenth-century sensible "man" as someone of considerable artifice. He is as well another historian concerned to show how sensibility was used by one group against another; indeed, his article is primarily about how various prominent abolitionist and slavery apologists used sentimental rhetoric in a heated battle for the hearts of the British public. Readers of abolitionist literature are made to seem as if their level of interest in the slave trade depended upon the ability of abolitionists to craft writings that provided

the satisfactions they were looking for. And these were? As the eighteenth-century progressed, readers increasingly expected sentimental descriptions of slaves so that they could make use of them to evidence their ostensibly intrinsic capacity to pity. As with Langford's, in Carey's account of them sentimental readers come across as a fickle lot—they had to be handled in just the right way. He writes that abolitionists such as James Ramsey needed to know just how to use guilt to make readers feel obliged to support abolitionist efforts, without insulting them. They come across as completely self-interested, and as rather insincere as well: in a part of the article where he informs us how sentimental rhetoric was employed by both abolitionists and by slavery apologists, we are told that both abolitionists and slavery apologists felt the sensible public could be distracted away from the goings-on in the slave trade. (We are told of how James Tobin and the Bristol newspapers used sentimental rhetoric in an effort to draw the sensitive reader to feel for the suffering agriculturalist and chimney sweep.)

Apparent in this article is not just how much the reading public demanded of writers of abolitionist literature, but also how able these writers proved in meeting their demands. About James Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*, Carey writes:

Ramsay's style is neither overtly evangelical, nor overtly sentimental. Rather, he sets out to discuss slavery under various headings and in various styles,

which initially gives the *Essay* a somewhat eclectic appearance. He writes about the history of slavery in the style of an historian, about the economics of slavery in the style of the new political economists, about the theology of slavery in the style of an Anglican clergyman, and about the humanity of slavery in the style of a sentimental novelist. Long before he chooses to deploy his sentimental rhetoric, Ramsay shows that he intends to be rigorous and scholarly. His descriptions of the daily routine of plantation slaves are meticulous on the one hand, while on the other hand he shows that he is prepared to take on some of the most celebrated thinkers of his age. (110)

Ramsay comes across here as a master of rhetoric, whose range and finesse with rhetorical tropes/tricks is on par with an adept playwright's. But Carey seems most concerned to characterize them not so much as artisans but as commanders, commanders who used rhetoric not simply to satisfy readers' desires and actions but to determine them. Thomas Clarkson (whose "*Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* [. . .] replaced James Ramsay's *Essay* as the handbook of the emerging abolition movement" [130]), though he had never been to Africa, still with his writings determined the nature of how Africa and the slave experience came to be understood in Britain through the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century (133).

And he was fully aware of his power: we are told he "recognized the power of his vision to mould other people's perceptions" (133).

When Carey attends to the sentimental efforts of slavery apologists, they too are described as empowered and cunning. Slavery apologists such as James Tobin come across, then, exactly as we would have expected them to have, given how they were introduced in the introduction (to the book of which this article constitutes one chapter) as "as skilful as they are insidious" (17). *They*—a select group—are insidious, evil; but like their rhetoric-wielding counterparts, they are not driven by sordid passions they remain largely unconscious of: they too are men of reason. Both groups of writers might, however, have come across as something other than as expert tacticians had Carey offered us lengthier selections of their descriptions of slave' or chimney sweep' life, and had he not directed us to look at the selections he does in fact supply as evidence of their rhetorical mastery. Though he does tell us that in Ramsay's *Essay* we can find "forty pages of minute detail of the slaves' daily sufferings" (11), and that in Clarkson's *Essay* "there are many terrible, painful images of slaves suffering, and [that] we are repeatedly asked to sympathize not with the dismal and melancholy images beloved of sentimentalists but with more horrific images of violence and abuse" (132), very likely at the end of reading his article we do not suspect their interest in suffering arose from their being perverse.

In "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in

Anglo-American Culture,” Karen Halttunen actually asks if writers of abolitionist literature (her focus is on British and American culture from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth-century) enjoyed writing about/depicting slaves’ suffering. She writes: “Was it possible [. . .] that the reformers’ own sensibilities had been blunted or, worse, that their spectatorship had generated in them a positive taste for cruelty?” (326). But Halttunen is not putting forward her own question here; rather, it is one reformers were themselves asking concerning the potential effects of their long-witnessing of pain and suffering. She argues that in the eighteenth-century the “cult of sensibility” (304) redefined pain so that it became something which was not just unacceptable, something which shouldn’t simply be tolerated as part of man’s lot, but something which could warp the minds and souls of those exposed to too much of it. It became generally understood that spectatorial sympathy could lead, not just to blunting one’s sensibilities but to the development of a taste for pain (308), a taste which manifested itself in the burgeoning popularity of gothic fiction. She writes that humanitarian reformers were concerned to prove that their own witnessing of horrific abuse hadn’t corrupted them. Anti-slavery writers, who often relied on extensive descriptions of torture they themselves had witnessed to help determine the nature of public regard for the slave trade, therefore “filled their writings with close descriptions of their own immediate emotional response to the spectacle of suffering, to demonstrate that their

sensibilities remained undamaged” (326). Reformers (anti-slave trade and otherwise) were also concerned that the printed word could cultivate a taste for pain. They used a variety of techniques to help “distance themselves from any imputations of sensationalistic pandering” (328). (For example, she notes that Newton and Clarkson both use asterisks [328].) But, she writes, “[m]ost commonly, reformers’ apologies, demurrals, and denials of sensationalism were simply followed by shockingly vivid representations of human suffering” (330).

If they knew or suspected that such vivid representations risked warping their audience, risked actually producing *more* cruelty, why then did they for the most part still persist in showing them to their audience? Two possible answers come to mind. One, they did so because they decided that though they surely risked harming their readers, many of the afflicted would as a result find themselves even more determined to do something to help end the suffering. Two, they did so because they were sadists—whether or not as a result of prolonged exposure to others’ pain, something had warped them so that they were now compelled to draw others into their sickly state. Halttunen considers both possibilities, but very clearly prefers the former. She tells us that “[t]he reformers’ purpose was not to exploit the obscenity of pain but to expose it, in order to redefine a wide range of previously accepted social practices as cruel and unacceptable” (330). However, she appreciates that by persisting to show the scenes they could be understood as

being moved primarily by the latter impulse. But she works to persuade and even intimidate us away from understanding reformers as mostly sadistic, for she writes, “the historical emergence of the pornography of pain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and its wide-ranging presence in a variety of popular literary genres point the historical inadequacy of attributing the phenomenon solely to sexual psychopathology, whether individual or collective” (331).

Marcus Wood, in “Stedman: Slavery, Empathy, Pornography,” more or less comes to the *opposite* conclusion: that is, he argues that writers and readers of pornographic depictions of slaves *were* moved primarily by sadistic and/or masochistic impulses—they *were* perverse. As a test case to see if the eroticization of slave imagery was necessarily pornographic, he explores John Stedman’s writings on the slave trade. He concludes that though Stedman’s work before the 1790s was often salutary, in the ’90s it is clear that Stedman produced work from which he clearly took pleasure in his eroticized depictions of slave life. Wood believes that Stedman satisfied two urges in particular when he wrote his scenes of slave torture. One, he satisfied his masochistic need to vicariously experience the victim’s pain. Two, he took masturbatory and sadistic pleasure in “witnessing” male and female slaves subjected (essentially) to sexual violation.

Wood would have us believe that the ostensibly sensible, those who wrote and read anti-slavery tracts, exploited the suffering of slaves in a way and to an extent advanced by no other historian so far considered. He really does make the

sensible out to be abhorrent and evil—people whose pleasure in witnessing abuse was such that it is hard to believe they could have been anything but disappointed when victory was achieved and the slave trade finally ended. But it isn’t just the eighteenth-century sensibles who stand so accused. That is, there is a strong sense that twentieth-century historians—his contemporaries, his own cohort—are being charged with being perverse as well. Historians approach what he believes is really quite obviously simply pornographic literature, always out of higher purpose—just like sensibles did—and neither, suspiciously, and ultimately *indictedly*, can see the pornography: Wood would have us know that actually they’re both excusing their satisfaction of illicit desires at their subjects’ expense.

Wood makes other historians seem worthy of censure, and some historians are responding to him in kind. Carey, for example, writes that “Wood may not convince all readers that abolitionists were principally motivated by a desire to view sado-masochistic pornography (although, no doubt, some were), but he does remind us very strongly that the discourse of slavery and abolition is thoroughly entwined with other early-modern and modern discourses about the body, the mind, the soul, society, economy, and the fundamental questions asked by every generation about human nature and humanity’s place in the universe” (13). In this reference to Wood’s writing, I, at least, sense Carey both admonishing and schooling Wood. Wood is being reminded that historians know that though there are always individual exceptions; no

group of people is entirely either benevolent or sick—they're always (ostensibly) a mixture of the good and the bad. People are essentially the same, wherever placed in time: their motives are common sense, never *psychiatrist*-worthy. Any other opinion is *self-evidently* ignorant. He is also being reminded that it is preferred that you mostly not talk motives, anyhow, especially their masturbatory, oral, sadistic, bodily ones. Instead, you are to talk about *cultural discourses about the body* subjects were located within and participated in. That is, you are to delimit the conversation about human motivation to conversations about conversations.

I happen to like Wood's willingness to write of historical subjects as having masturbatory and oral needs. I admire how involved Wood is willing to become in the lives of those he studies, of the risk he is willing to take in hopes of figuring out what makes them tick. There is a real sense that when he estimates that Stedman "is like some gargantuan method actor always trying to get inside the experience of the victim, [. . .] always trying to eat up their suffering, so that in the end he can play their part better than they did" (139-40), that he came to this conclusion by trying to get inside Stedman's experiential world. That is, in his efforts to understand Stedman, he becomes something of the method actor himself. This sort of immersion is risky; identifying with someone like Stedman may be unsettling, and rarely do I see such boldness from historians. It can also lead to ridicule. For example, in the '70s the psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause wrote that he would curl up in a fetal position to help access

the mental/emotional states of historical subjects he believed were regressing to states associated with birth, but such admissions helped make both him and psychohistory aptly sumuppable as "clownish" once academia had finally cleared itself from the unsettling 1960s/70s influences that had them for a short while letting their guard down, and allowing some outside "crazy thinking" in.

Wood's essay actually very much reminds me of the sort of research one can still find in journals (if even still, ever so rarely) such as *The Journal of Psychohistory*. As with Wood's essays, articles for this journal are willing to and do assume that historical subjects were often far more emotive, passionate, and sexual than they were rational and calculating. Unlike Wood's article, however, what they don't do is moralize; and it is his strong tendency to moralize, to condemn, that I find puzzling, unfortunate, and am myself inclined to want to censure. Wood understands Stedman and other reformers as sadists and/or masochists. He can identify Stedman as "a person of strong direct emotional responses and apparently without remorse" (138). But he does not seem to want us to involve ourselves in understanding how he came to be this way. No, Stedman is not set up to be understood, only for censure and ridicule. For example, when he discusses Stedman's fear that he could be the subject of female rape, he directs us to "see the hysterical and intensely misogynistic account in Stedman, 1962, 39-40" (125). One senses here that if we looked at the account he directs us to and did not immediately recognize Stedman as but a vile

woman-hater, he would judge us suspect ourselves. Be assured, a therapist would find Wood's characterization of Stedman as working against an empathic appreciation of why he feared older women; indeed, s/he would conclude it worked against understanding him, and judge it, as I judge it—cruel.

The current historiographical exploration of sensitivity and the English slave trade suggests that true sensitivity and empathy is a very hard thing to cultivate. But though I gauge Wood's desire to humiliate Stedman, to show him up, extremely unfortunate, I find his efforts far more emancipatory and encouraging than depressing. With his work, with the alarmed reaction his work inspires from other historians, I sense the conception of historical subjects as mostly reasoning (or calculating) as coming under effective attack, and believe it could work to build stronger bridges between history and psychology/therapy. My hope is that it could help move some of those currently entering the historical field to engage more seriously with explorations of historical motives, once so fruitfully entertained in the '70s. And if some of them do look anew at the research being engaged with at that time, they might find themselves empowered so they could actually accept Wood's assessment of reformers, recognize them as often disingenuous, and yet still understand them as *genuinely* improving—as members of a generation *that really were* more empathic and sensitive than their predecessors were. That is, they might come to appreciate that the old whig historians, though mostly about

triumphalism, actually held constant to an admirable historical truth.

Works Cited and/or Consulted

- Barker-Benfield, G. J. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. Print.
- Carey, Brycchan. *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.
- Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven: YaleUP, 1994. Print.
- Haltunnen, Karen. "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture." *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 303-34.
- Langford, Paul. *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989. Print.
- Mellor, Anne. *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000. Print.
- Robinson, Forrest. *Having it Both Ways: Self-Subversion in Western Popular Classics*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1993. Print.
- Wood, Marcus. *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.

The Good Fight (July 2006)

George Walker's *Love and Anger* celebrates the virtues of a good fight, of a good war, and the rewards it offers its participants. Though wars are a kind of an embrace, they cannot be engaged in by lovers—they require good guys and bad guys, who hate one another. Walker implicitly understands how the *desire* for war *mostly* moves *all* wars, and communicates it primarily by cuing us to appreciate that all the good characters involved in the play's battle between good and evil have similar-seeming evil counterparts. That is, he guides us to see everyone involved in the fray as potentially interchangeable, as *truly* of the same kind. So if war is being praised, is there anything or anyone in the play subjected to unmitigated critique? Yes, someone is. Though it well might be missed, *Eleanor* is set up for brutal criticism, for she is an agent of the cruel suppression *peacemaking* affords, and the play is strongly aligned against goodly-doers of this absolutely worst sort.

I understand that many will read or see the play and

DRAINING THE AMAZON'S SWAMP

judge it a satiric attack on power, lust, and greed—the usual triumvirate of the awful—embodied in its characters Sean Harris and John Connor. Yet much would have to be ignored in order to interpret the play this way. One would have to ignore much of how the play begins, for instance, for it begins with the ostensible foremost good and enlightened character, Peter Maxwell, indulging in just these same vices. Though he was once as vice-prone as any other, though he agrees with Harris when he argues that “for twenty years [he was] [. . .] one of the greediest and one of the biggest” “greedy prick[s]” (70), Maxwell believes himself now reborn, newly pure. Ostensible evidence of his goodly transformation comes from the fact that he gave up a lucrative position as head of a prominent Toronto law firm to deal with society's downtown' downtrodden. It also comes from his giving-away of all his possessions. Connor is willing to believe Sarah when she suggests, as part of an effort to manipulate him, that Maxwell might be “env[ious]” (50) of him; but though vice-prone, he has no real cause to be envious, for the play begins by showing just how much he actually acquired through descent.

He gets, for instance, new clientele—of in truth an especially appealing kind. Though Maxwell wants us to imagine them as consisting not just of the disadvantaged but of the “quasi-exotic,” the “pathetic,” the “dregs” (30-31), and though Harris deems Maxwell's new clientele more reason to pity him, to not draw the law down upon him, the only client of his we actually encounter provides him something he likely

did not possess with any surety with his previous clientele—namely, clear evidence of his power *over* them. That is, though Maxwell says that with his previous clientele he used to “piss on their ingrained intelligence” (19), simply in order to afford his services his previous clientele would have had to have counted amongst the very rich and entitled—they would have been the sort to know that Maxwell was *their* lawyer, ultimately their *servant*, that *they* were the ones paying him. And though they would have respected Maxwell’s reputation and genius, this would have made him—but appropriate, to properly attend to their business. Indeed, though the play concerns Maxwell’s life after having left his old law firm, it still reminds us of what previous clientele contact could have been like by showing us how Harris’s new client, Connor, reacts when he believes he’s being poorly served. When confused and confounded by Sarah’s behavior towards him, Connor turns to Harris and exclaims: “Look, you’re my lawyer and I want some answers from you right now!” (51). With Gail, Maxwell’s new client, however, though she shows some dismay with her lawyer—i.e., Maxwell—too, she is readily made quiescent, for she is vastly more dependent on hers than Connor is on his own. Connor, being rich, can always hire a different lawyer, an option not available to her. Nor is there any chance that even if she could find other help, s/he’d count amongst the country’s best lawyerly minds, something we are told Maxwell once was, and may still be. Her dependency upon Maxwell, we note, is made clear both to her and to us at the beginning of the first scene. Maxwell

seems to have taken advantage of the fact that he knows Gail really has no one else to turn to by speaking to her in ways he wouldn’t dare with a less dependent client—with someone who really could afford to turn down his services. Maxwell has talked to her—or, more accurately, *at* her—for a half an hour, concerning things which clearly interest him but are of little interest to her. When Gail complains about his apparent lack of interest in her own concerns, Maxwell responds by first reminding her that she is marginal (Maxwell tells her, “You’re marginal. Your cause is marginal. Outside the corridor, so to speak” [13]), then of how lucky she is to have found him (Maxwell tells her, “I believe you when obviously no one else does” [14]), and moves her to appreciate that “a shiny new future” (15) depends entirely on her “letting” him behave just as he wishes (Maxwell tells her, “you’ll have to allow me to proceed in my own way” [14]). That is, in response to her agitation and assertiveness, Maxwell manages her into—*for him*—comfortable pliancy.

Gail will not be paying Maxwell in cash—there is something else he desires from her. This something isn’t sex, but the play guides us to appreciate that—if he had been a slightly different man... For with Gail, the play presents us with a childish—with her ball cap and jeans—young woman whose readiness to be servile is suggested in her being in his office in response to Maxwell’s beckoning (i.e., his “call” [14]). She has a husband—but his return to her rests entirely with her getting this middle-aged man to agree to take on her cause. This he agrees to, but only if she agrees to “trust” (15)

him, to accept his unusual behavior and submit to his odd requests. He hints that the thing she most has to offer is love, a willingness and an ability to service the needs of all those in “need [of] love” (15). She shows this, but also fear: she fears he might be “crooked.” In sum, though I think—especially with his easing her fears, his effort to get her to trust him, and his assurance that if she does so her reward will be a shiny new future—there is something in their relationship that smacks of the pedophilic “relationship” between the candy-laden pedophile and the guileless child, we more strongly sense the middle-aged man seeking not quite so puerile revitalization through associations with the young. Someone, that is, who is undergoing your typical midlife crisis.

It should be difficult to understand Maxwell any different. He is in his early fifties and has been further reminded of his mortality by just having suffered a stroke. His mind is clearly on death: when he surveys his life, he imagines it one where “Death was surrounding [him] [. . .] like a demon inevitability” (17). He suddenly understands his life as unfulfilling—the *definitive* midlife crisis complaint. Harris, we note, makes the same complaint. And when Harris visits them we are made to appreciate how these ostensibly now completely different men still share the exact same life goals.

With Harris and Maxwell, we have two men of about the same age (specifically, Maxwell is “50,” Harris, in his “early 50s” [12]), who pursued the same career path—law—and seek rejuvenation: Maxwell seeks “rebirth” (31), Harris, “new challenges” (27). Maxwell believes himself on a very different

track than the one Harris still resides on, and there is cause to mistake them as vastly dissimilar from one another. Maxwell has stripped himself of his earthly goods; Harris’ new pursuit is built on all he had accumulated: he will use the friends and reputation he has acquired from being an established lawyer to launch a career as a politician. Maxwell locates himself in the “gutters” and associates with the destitute; Harris seeks “new mountain”-tops and takes on increasingly affluent and powerful clients (i.e., Connor). But the differences, though they appear significant, remain superficial: both paths attend to the very same needs, to assuaging the exact same fear. The (stereo)typical midlife fear is of death, and both paths tend to this fear. Maxwell believes that with his new life he has regained his childhood. He prefers to be called “Petie” because it better suits who he has become—“[y]ounger,” “more unfinished” (30). He believes he has become the person he once was before law school corrupted him, the young Maxwell who once had principles, who followed his parents’ code of honor. Rather than someone who will soon face death, he believes his miraculous re-invention of himself amounts to a re-birth. He will help create a “new era”: phase two is “[t]he amazing rebirth of Petie Maxwell and the new era to which he is dedicated” (31). But though Maxwell will be reborn, Harris’s new path means his maybe never perishing: for no matter how successful a lawyer becomes, it is only the lawyer who moves on to become a politician that has any chance of being immortalized.

In short, the play provides very good reason for

understanding these two men as not so different from one another as they prefer to believe is the case. Maxwell believes Harris used him. He wants Harris to believe his theft of his wife and kids made him feel like one of “God’s lowest creatures” (32). But we should not believe him in this, for Harris’ theft is actually advantageous for Maxwell. In pursuit of a new life path, Maxwell seeks to shorn himself of all that ties him to a previous one he associates with death. He gleefully gives away all he had acquired during his twenty years as a lawyer, but had he also had to distance himself from his wife and kids, he would not have been able to do so so readily. Middle-aged men who in their mid-life crisis act childishly and hang out with young women, often experience a crippling hangover: they must deal with the anger and disappointment they receive from wives and children they’ve neglected and humiliated. Thanks to Harris’ “theft” (for though Maxwell chides Harris for thinking of his wife as a possession, it seems clear that Maxwell thinks of her as much the same: he exclaims, “You’d been screwing *my* wife” [32; emphasis added]), Maxwell can more readily understand his rebirth as something earned.

If Harris’ own path wasn’t predicated on accumulation, Maxwell might actually owe him one for taking his wife (a wife, we note, he thought a “jerk” [31]) and kids off his hands. By having Maxwell argue that his humiliation could be completed *either* by his bending down and kissing Harris’ ass *or* by Harris bending down and kissing Maxwell’s, the play suggests that who exactly is using whom here may not be so

clear. More than this, with the humiliation accomplishable regardless of who does the bending down and who the remaining upright, the play encourages us to assess Maxwell’s descent and Harris’ ascent as interchangeable; as means to the very same end.

Since Harris is Maxwell’s old partner, and since Connor is made to seem as much Harris’ new partner as he is his new client (they are likened to a team throughout), we are guided to compare Maxwell and Connor as if they were former and current partners of Harris.’ And, indeed, in how they both differ from Harris—and despite Maxwell’s attempt to establish Connor as nothing more than a Nazi—they *can* seem similar. Maxwell acknowledges that Harris is charming. His charm and ease are the products of his privileged family background. He is polished, good-looking, superior—the sort of person people can feel almost obligated to promote to societies’ highest positions. Both Maxwell and Connor have made good but despite the odds, through their ingenuity and boldness. Connor makes clear that he more or less emerged from nothing, that he came from a working-class background. The same seems true of Maxwell as well, for he characterizes his background as one where humility and honor were the highest virtues—virtues, that is, held in highest-esteem typically by the conservative working class. Both, too, are hotheads. Connor is explosive and quick to anger; and even though Maxwell can be tender, he certainly rages as well. (Harris accuses him of having spread “outrageous, bullheaded, unsupportable, inflaming crap”

about Connor, and given what we see of Maxwell, we do not doubt the accuracy of these characterizations.)

Both claim the same turf: they're ostensibly all about serving the needs of the lower classes. Maxwell would be their legal and moral crusader, Connor their guide to all they need know of the world. In fact, given all we had by then heard of Connor and Maxwell, at the beginning of scene three, when Sarah is telling Eleanor and Gail her story of an invasion, as we hear her story and think of its protagonists we might be thinking as much of Maxwell as we are of Connor. Her story is about invasive men "looking for a place to take over," that are "[l]ooking for adventure" (33). These men have "sold" (33) all their goods, have "prostitute[d]" "their wives," and set up a "headquarters" in this alien territory (33-4). They believe themselves "indestructible," are intent on being "free to be themselves," have voices inside them "talking to them," and have a proprietary, expansive desire to get their "word [. . .] out" (34). Maxwell is looking for adventure (he will identify his activities as an "adventure" [42]), he has given away all his goods, he has a wife now sleeping with another man, he believes he is "immune" (32) to persecution, he has entered an unfamiliar part of town and set up headquarters there, he has argued that his turn to the "dark side" in law school resulted from a force having taken him over, he believes himself finally "back" (26) to being the man he once was, he has made the whole city aware of his opinion of Connor, and he has his mind on the "reorganization of an entire culture" (29). So even though

Sarah's story is about crusaders who hate those not-white-in-color, and even though Maxwell and others repeatedly call Connor a Nazi, it is a story that actually lends to understanding its main protagonists as being more similar to *Maxwell* than to Connor.

So given that the play encourages us to consider just how different villains really are from heroes, the play could be assessed as a satire on the efforts of societal do-gooders, with all their ostensibly selfless, noble intentions. Though I have focused on the play's first act, its ending even better supports this thesis. The trial evidences an outrageously greedy and unfair Maxwell. Though he acknowledges that you can repent just by "say[ing] to yourself, 'I repent'" (70), Maxwell won't allow that Harris might do the same to exonerate himself. That is, "The demigod [,] [. . .] [t]he former greedy prick[,] [. . .] [t]he man with a hole in his brain[,] [. . .] [t]he angry man[,] [. . .] [t]he reborn man[,] [. . .] [t]he avenger!" (71)—*Maxwell*—is the only one who gets to repent. One cannot but sense here that to Maxwell, Harris is simply means to satisfy his own need to feel grandiose. The trial also evidences a greedy and unfair Sarah as the presiding judge. Sarah believes she is fair, not prejudicial (79), but she too is shown using the trial to humiliate Connor and Harris—the same need she attended to earlier by fooling them into thinking she was a lawyer ("Well that just shows how stupid you are. I'm a mental patient. You've been tricked by a person with a shattered mind" [51]). Her verdict of brutal humiliation and execution (they are to be drowned in toilets) for the guilty, is moved by

whim, not evidence. And since this verdict follows a long series of humiliations (which include brutal physical assault, and exhaustive name-calling) inflicted upon the two (on Connor, especially), it is no surprise that a number of critics find the court scene indulgent and counter-productive.

Mel Gussow, for one, in a review for the *New York Times*, argues that the play is “self-defeating[,]” for “[a]s the lawyer [Maxwell] [. . .] sinks deeper into misanthropy and into sermonizing, he becomes increasingly tiresome” (*New York Times*, 9 December 1990). Of course, if the play is judged a satiric attack on progressive reformers rather than on the rich and powerful, Gussow’s reaction would argue for its effectiveness, not its failure. Indeed, those who react to the play as Gussow does and are familiar with the history of satire, could see the play as akin to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, for, just as *Love and Anger* makes the rich and poor seem similar to one another, just as it repeatedly emphasizes their intrinsic similarity and mutual culpability by having them frequently fuse into “a mass of punching, kicking, groaning bodies” (52),

[t]he *Metamorphoses* shows that in a narrative satire fictions operate through the interrelatedness of characters: not only the relationship between two people, a fool and a knave, but between rich and poor fools, [. . .] and so on. They are held close to a theme or a vice, but they also project a visualizable world of total interrelatedness, like a cheese completely

infiltrated by maggots [. . .] [. . .] As it is unrolled, this world is monotonously similar in all its details, and finally static; but a world nevertheless in which Lucius [principle character of the *Metamorphoses*] is himself deeply implicated. (Ronald Paulson 57)

Or perhaps they would find the play akin to picaresque satires, to those satires that feature Quixote (heroic)-figures who aim to be honorable but “easily become [. . .] selfish egoist[s] who tr[y] to make over the world in [their] [. . .] own image” (Paulson 101). But though in so many ways *Love and Anger* seems intent on critiquing would-be heroes and leaving it at that, its over-all intention is *not* really to show them up. Instead, the play argues for the real wisdom, rather than the folly, to be found—by one and all—through war.

The play makes this argument primarily through what it shows happening to Sarah when she engages with those she believes evil and beyond redemption. Just as it worked to make Maxwell comparable to those he feuds with, the play encourages us to understand Sarah as much the same as all the others constituting the massings that develop out of each of the melees. She believes Connor to be similarly possessed by mean-spirited voices, which talk to and control them. She serves as Maxwell’s new partner, and thereby is primed for ready comparison with his previous one—Harris. She too is in search of revitalization and freedom. And though while pretending to be his new law partner, she is the one who voices a loud critique of simplistic, brutal solutions (i.e., she gets Connor to admit the absurdity of killing the poor as a

solution to downtown problems), she actually demonstrates why brutality can be an effective means towards solving longstanding concerns. After Sarah does the amazing in persuading a veteran lawyer and a canny businessman she is a competent lawyer who can handle and manipulate Maxwell, she, Gail, Harris, and Connor participate in a wild melee. The fight is followed by a blackout and an intermission: the audience is made to wonder just what might have happened?, to speculate as to what good could possibly have followed from two women taking on at least one highly enraged male opponent who “wanted to kill” (53) them. When the play resumes, the audience is provided good reason to decide things turned out badly, for “[t]he office is a mess,” “Gail is sitting on the floor against the desk [,] [. . .] and Sarah is lying face down near the door” (53). But though Sarah says she likely has a broken bone, both she and Gail are in fact actually doing very well. Sarah found delivering blows very “satisfying”; she thoroughly enjoyed getting “in a few really good whacks” (53). She in fact guesses that she’d have been better off if she’d “started hitting earlier in [. . .] life” (53), and seems right in this, for fighting lead not just to a high but to be able “to make sense” (54), to sanity, to a willingness to admit she does not in fact believe herself black: a substantial step toward using something superior to avoidance to deal with her troubles.

The battle proved therapeutic; and in the loving and supportive sisterhood it helped beget between Gail and Sarah, it looks to have engendered even more. And we note that

after the fight, neither of them hate their opponents. Instead, Gail reflects on how her preferred way of seeing the rich cloaked her from being aware of her own *need* to hate them, and admits that the rich might not even actually be the villains she had admittedly willfully taken them for. Sarah admits she imagines herself black because it helps her “feel brave” (54), and she’s surely onto something here: for previously she admitted that though she “doesn’t take messages” from ordinary people, she would rise to action if such calls came from “[p]eople threatening Petie” (35).

Though they seem to do little more than drug her up, her doctors might still appreciate that what Sarah really needed was to be around those who could draw her out. For we are told they believe Sarah “has to have a way, even in her state, to manifest her courage [. . .] [—] [t]hat her courage is still the most important thing to her” (35). It is Eleanor who relates this information, and it is Eleanor who clearly does not believe it—for she responds to Sarah’s participation in the fray simply by berating her for it. She sees the results of the melee and judges it foul—and *as* surely resulting from Sarah’s impulsive decision to attack Gail. She is irate, and tells her sister to stop “scaring [her] [. . .] to death” (56). Eleanor would have Sarah remain pacified, sedated through drugs, because an active and alert Sarah is a source of considerable distress for her. We note that Eleanor wishes Maxwell had failed in his efforts to shift his work to the slums for the same selfish reason. For even while he’s suffering from another stroke, she can’t help but berate him for making a move that

has her feeling “very uneasy” and unable to “function” (56). Maxwell, however, wants Eleanor to join in with his group, to join in with his movement. It is a request he makes several times, and we note her typical response: “Don’t involve me in whatever it is you’re up to these days. I have problems of my own” (16). Near the play’s close, however, she says she would be “grateful” (61) to be included—but in truth this would be cause not for celebration but for regret, for nowhere in the text is there a hint that she would prove anything but a very sour addition to Maxwell’s gang.

Eleanor is a bummer, a spoiler of everyone else’s fun. Even after she says she would “honestly” be very grateful to be included in Maxwell’s plans, just her presence causes Sarah to lose confidence in her performance as the trial’s judge (we noticed her ascent from patient to lawyer to judge) and begin to cry. She is most active in the trial when she slaps Connor on the face for his blasphemous prayer, an act consistent with her response to Maxwell’s lambasting of religion at the beginning of the play. (A battle follows her slapping of Connor, but we note that since somehow everyone *but* Eleanor ends up “form[ing] [the] [. . .] mass of [tangled] bodies” that end up on the couch, her being excluded is made to seem as if it is one of the points behind the melee.) She is the one who would call the police or the hospital in response to any dangerous development—and we note that if she had called an ambulance after Maxwell suffered his stroke, he would have been denied the opportunity to die honorably, redemptively, in battle. (Harris and other characters also at

times threaten to call the police, but they always pull back from doing so; indeed, their threats to call the police make them seem akin to kids who threaten the same but are actually determined not to let things move into adult control.)

We also note that in scene one Maxwell’s sudden need to berate people on the street, to insist that they “[h]ave a little self-respect” (19), follows his being schooled by Eleanor on the proper way to treat people. That is, Eleanor, who was introduced as “[c]arrying a bag of cleaning supplies” (16), who is identified by her sister as being “brilliant” at “tidy[ing] up” (61), makes Maxwell, the would-be crusader of the downtrodden, sound, in his demand that the street people “[g]et out of the garbage” (19), just like she does. The real threat to Maxwell and Sarah’s rejuvenation clearly is not Harris and Connor, who, though they begin by mocking the trial, not only actively participate in it but end up crediting its legitimacy—they dance and cheer when they believe the apparently-not-so-show trial has established their innocence and clarified their virtue—but rather, Eleanor. And after she unsettles Maxwell and Sarah, she herself gets violated.

Connor greatly unsettles Eleanor when he handles her and moves her out of his way (20), and in this particular instance, violence is set up as praiseworthy, not because it can make people feel good but because it can of course also make them feel really, really lousy. Maxwell judges Connor’s behavior to be truly odious. He calls Connor a “bully” (20), and suggests his behavior toward Eleanor proves he must have beaten his secretary so badly she required hospitalization

(21). But the play guides us to question just how offended Maxwell really is by Connor's violence towards her, to wonder if at some level if Connor, in attacking her, is serving as Maxwell's agent. Connor's assault on Eleanor follows a contest between Maxwell and her that seems as if between mother and child. While interacting with Gail, he takes out and plays with a string of colored paper clips. Eleanor, wishing him to behave less childishly, takes them from him, an act he follows rebelliously by taking another clip from out of his pocket. But since this contest ends with her successfully chiding Maxwell away from childish behavior toward an advocacy of orthodox adult virtues (i.e., cleanliness, self-respect), it is one she wins decisively. And then, we note, Connor bullies her. Maxwell actually construes the attack as a child's upon his mother. He asks Connor, "What's wrong. Some trouble with mummy?" (20). But the play makes clear that it is Maxwell, not Connor, who is prone to think of Eleanor as his mother, for his near last words are, "Eleanor, you look like my mother" (83).

Eleanor is not gravely hurt by play's end, and if we assess the play as holding the same conception of mothers many of those living in the twentieth-century's other extended period of Darwinian capitalism—the 1920s—did, this would have been too much to ask. At one point in the play Maxwell calls God a "she" (42), suggesting that rather than a man and a father the almighty is instead a woman and a mother. Ann Douglas writes that '20's New Yorkers believed the same thing, that is, that the greatest obstacle to growth was a

(historical) woman (in their case, their predecessor, the Victorian Titaness)—and held destroying her the first of priorities. Specifically, she argues in *Terrible Honesty* that for its cultural emergence modern New York depended upon a collective, ruthless effort to distinguish itself from a Victorian, matriarchal past. New Yorkers, she argues, believed their predecessors to be puppets of clan matriarchs, and in order to avoid their fate, made their city fully offensive to matriarchal control.

Douglas spends a great deal of her book delineating how writers especially played a big part in helping New Yorkers understand their city as matricidal, in showing how they not only helped create but helped keep going the manic but highly creative '20s energy. And it may be that works such as *Love and Anger* played a part in helping sustain the manic period of indulgent capitalism Torontonians experienced at the end of the twentieth-century. For just like how writers in the '20s helped entrench the presence of the brutal, empowered father-figure, *Love and Anger* leaves us with the sense that the text's featured bully(er) of mothers—Connor—will continue to rule in Toronto. It ends with *him* feeling rejuvenated, dead set on "keep[ing] the momentum going" (81). And though it is easy to imagine playgoers being disappointed in this, it is just as easy to imagine the affluent amongst them, those enjoying all the spoils capitalism afforded them, feeling reassured that this satire was not one which foretold the end to bad-boy economics. Since satires are normally understood not just as critiques but as agents of

reform, the Toronto-advantaged were likely well allayed in it actually playing out as something of an anti-satire.

Works Cited

Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*.

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. Print.

Gussow, Mel. "Behind the Scenes Villainy at Court." *The New*

York Times. 9 December 1990. Web.

Paulson, Ronald. *The Fictions of Satire*. Baltimore: John

Hopkins Press, 1967. Print.

Walker, George. *Love and Anger*. Toronto: Coach House,

1990. Print.

Soothing Satire (July 2006)

Generation X purports to offer "tales for an accelerated culture," but it really offers tales that service the needs of a select group of people—those who constitute Generation X. Its aim is therapeutic; it seeks not so much to scold as to heal. But if we care about such things, it may yet still be judged a satiric text. For healing requires the construction of a group surround, a secure, distinct sense of themselves as different from all others, and recent scholarship has it that this is something satires are wont to do too. Though we may not be prepared to imagine satires as as much about the construction of groups as they are about criticizing them, in *The Literature of Satire* Charles Knight argues that eighteenth-century satires, at least, did nurture the development of "nations" (a particular kind of group), and that they did this by "celebrating" "the characteristics of one's nation" while "mock[ing]" "those of others" (58-59).

Generation X cultivates a generation's identity rather than a national one, but works in the same way Knight believes

eighteenth-century satire once did: that is, those select group of twenty/thirty-somethings who aim to simplify their life, to opt out of a society bent on the mindless acquisition of more and more, are made to seem salutary, while those who either choose to remain within, or are unaware of the problematic nature of, their society, become worthy of mockery. Since Gen Xers like to see themselves as nicer than other people, they would have to take care when they mock. And though I think they do this because they really are that damned nice, the fact that after they mock they often pull-back afterwards and reprimand themselves for being unfair, does make them seem concerned to not be too mean. An example of such pulling-back occurs when, after Claire assesses the old patrons who visit her store as “endless waves of gray hair gobbling up the jewels and perfumes at work,” and as “greedy little children who are so spoiled, and so impatient, that they can’t even wait for food to be prepared” (9), the narrator admits that however much he enjoyed Claire’s characterization of them, it was nevertheless “a cruel, lopsided judgment of what Palm Springs really is” (9-10). But given how frequently members of generations which precede and follow their own are characterized as not just shallow and unconscious but as barely controllable beings with insatiable oral needs, we are guided to conclude that though it might well be cruel to mock them, it would be hopeless to try and redeem them.

By oral needs, I mean an insatiable desire to chat and chew (and vomit—they seem to do a lot of that too). Gen

Xers are subject to their (i.e., other generations’) “incessant” “chatting” (33), and are keenly aware of their need to chew. Claire imagines old ladies as capable of eating live animals, as “sucking the food right out of them” (9), but the text makes clear that they’d much prefer human meat, for they count amongst the numerous essentialized as cannibals in the text. Mrs. Baxter would eat her brood, and even the stylish, the tailored—Tyler and his set—“would have little, if any, compunction about eating [their] fellow[s]” (106). Those with cannibalistic tendencies cannot of course be expected to move society in progressive new directions. Whatever the nature of their self-assessments, regardless of where they’ve dined—regardless of who they’ve dined upon!—devourers cannot constitute a society’s brain trust. But they may yet have something important to offer—other than making Gen Xers look good in comparison, that is. Just as those deemed intrinsically debased—slaves—kept the American-plantation South and ancient Greece “going,” commercial societies’ peons can be trusted to work, work, work, so they can buy, buy, buy. All of them, even Andy’s parents, who count amongst the text’s few non-Gen Xers that aren’t characterized as creatures of appetite, enjoy the fruits of commercial society, and all of them can at least be trusted to keep things moving, to keep dramatic change at bay, and thereby service Gen Xers’ foremost need—to feel that the ground they stand on won’t unexpectedly shift away.

Clearly evident in the text is how much Gen Xers fear the future. Andy admits to this fear, but the margins as much

as the main text inform us of it. The margins—Gen X’s territory—tell of their efforts to overcome their fear, by switching lifestyles, for example (26). They tell of Gen X’s awareness of the “false sense of security among coworkers in an office environment (111), of their suspicion that “you might not count in the new world order” (159), and of their desperate need to believe that someone out there will take care of them (34). But the margins tell another story too, namely, that the behemoth commercial society, its ways and its products, will last and last, and so the path of the future, as depressing as it might seem, is nevertheless clearly spelled out—certain. Shoppers might “pretend that the large, cement blocks thrust into their environment do not, in fact, exist” (71), but they manifestly do. Thrust into *our* face is the text’s message that “the love of meat *prevents* any real change” (10; emphasis added). And because society’s cannibalistic carnivores enjoy “stuff” as much as they enjoy “steak,” “Brazilification,” a widening of the gap “between the rich and the poor” (11), is made to seem as if it cannot but be the future.

This is not to say that everything made to seem permanent is not subsequently made to seem perishable. For example, Andy states that his parents’ home has been in essentially the same state for decades, but also that much energy has been put into “staving off evidence of time’s passing” (137), and that for all such effort, it could still prove victim to sudden catastrophe. But there is a sense that should disaster occur, it would be precipitated not by others but by

Andy’s parents themselves, out of a felt need to prove their fears justified. Fear of the future precipitates disaster, but again, though this fear is registered by some who don’t count amongst the Gen X set—by Dag’s former office mate, Margaret, for example—the buying hordes either seem blissfully unaware there is anything to fear or understand “catastrophe” as no more than an exciting thrill-ride. Tyler’s generation does not fear the future. Nor, seemingly, do Phil and Irene—that is, those who live in a “permanent 1950s” (112). Andy admits to envying Tyler his lack of fear, and he may be just as “sooth[ed]” (112) by him as he is by Phil’s and Irene’s ongoing 1950s.

In a chapter titled “It can’t last,” we find further evidence of just why “it”—i.e., commercial society—actually can. Claire, discussing how pained she is to be visiting Disneyland with her cousins at the age of twenty-seven, looks to the resort she’s staying at and says, “I can’t *believe* I let myself get dragged into this. If the wind doesn’t knock this place down first, it’ll implode from a lack of hipness” (37). The resort, La Spa de Luxembourg, will disappear one day, but would be replaced by something equally obnoxious. The needs of obnoxious but unrelenting families like the one she’s burdened with, who, though they talk about disasters, do so in a “spirited” (34) manner, ensure this will be the case. And we should not believe that Claire would have it otherwise. For though both she and Andy imagine blowing apart the staidness, the text suggests that they would be upset if any such disruption actually occurred. When it turns out Claire’s

father is having a heart attack rather than just another one of his faux ones, when Andy describes his parents' fear that their never-changing house could be vandalized, the narrative does not turn towards gleeful celebration; instead, it veers in the opposite direction. It is not that Gen Xers do not desire for their families, the outside world, to undergo dramatic alteration—they very likely do, but *not* before they're (i.e., Gen Xers) ready. And Gen Xers won't be ready until they've dressed the damage life had inflicted upon them before they opted out.

Preparing themselves so they're ready for change may in fact be a large part of what Gen Xers are up to behind the walls of their constructed generational surround, within their established sanctuaries. That is, with the semi-conscious slaves of commercial society going about their business, with the outside world, in its routineness, in its predictableness, seeming in some ways akin to the day-to-day life of those living within boring but safe Texlahoma, Gen Xers are not using their free time as plantation owners and Greek aristocrats were wont to do with theirs. They aren't luxuriously languishing. They aren't simply philosophizing. They aren't even doing what Andy says they are doing—not really. Andy says they are stitching together stories “to make their own lives worthwhile” (8); and though their stories may make them seem enviably cool, worthy of admiration, though their stories do work to make them seem worthy of celebration in the way Knight argues satiric tales once helped make Britons feel, they stitch more to repair than they do to

construct. But maybe we should expect this from storytellers these days—even satirical ones. That is, though scholars like John Clare argue that the severe wars between nations in the twentieth-century has meant that not just satirists but all writers will be drawn to write of entropy, of the inevitability of dissolution and decay, it may in fact be more reasonable to expect the opposite from them: that is, that shared, widescale multi-national tragedies would lead to sustained efforts to use stories to help recover from a lengthy period of disquiet.

It may be that shocks can be quitted through potentially disquieting means, though. It may have been beneficial for Andy to have chosen to recall, and thereby come to associate, his memory of when his Americanness lead him to being subject to a crowd of Japanese co-workers' jealous gazes, with his just having made a carload of Japanese tourists feel uncomfortable and fearful. But clearly the stories themselves and/or the nature of the environment in which they are told helps ease or quit shocks by means less sadistic. Indeed, he tells us about the drawbacks of being selected for special attention by a Japanese executive, not just *after* a confrontation but *amidst* a group of friends, who've agreed not to critique one another's stories. Andy borrowed the practice from alcoholics anonymous; but while those in AA used it at one another's expense, Andy and his friends use it help one another heal and improve. Told within a nurturing atmosphere of friends who genuinely want to help one another live better lives, the awfulness that emerges from their stories about the sun, for example, lead to Andy's

decision not to partake in such awfulness, and to Claire's decision that they ask for more from themselves than using stories to construct a "carapace of coolness" (8).

Cushioning can also be found within some of the stories themselves. For instance, Evlina finishes her telling of Tyler's distressful life story with her beaming restorative warmth and love into his eyes. Andy's story of how Edward's room became a nightmaric enclosure also ends—with Edward emerging into a world which promises that you can "move about with ease" (51), once you've learned your way—soothingly. So, too, his story of his distressful encounter with the Japanese executive, which has him back in Portland "breathing less crowded airs" (59). But as is clear from Claire's reaction to their stories about the sun, the stories themselves neither need be warm nor end warmly for them to assist Andy's group of friends "live life" more "healthily" (8). Indeed, very often it seems their stories function primarily to help point out the exact nature of their wounds so that within the confines of their sanctuary they can be addressed. Andy's fictional and true-life stories reveal his obsession with, and very likely also his fear of, "vandalism," of sudden and violent intrusion. For instance, he has his character Edward bar doors against all others (but the intruder is already inside his enclosure), his own encounter with executive made him "feel as though [he] [. . .] had just vandalized a house" (58), and he attends to his parents' fear that "a drifter [would] [. . .] break its way inside [their home] and commit an atrocity" (144). In his stories, vandalism, break-ins, are catastrophic, but in his

Palm Springs' enclosure, with Dag and Claire (especially Claire) forever "invad[ing]" (5) his space, break-ins become routine, and more a source of stimulation than upset.

Messes also upset Andy, but Dag, who creates them, shows in his stories he fears not messes but the possible reactions his messmaking might produce. Dag's gasoline-spilling story likely wouldn't be his favorite had he not known all too well what it was like to draw upon himself less pleasing reactions from those whose love and support he needed. He was pleased his father didn't get angry; but though the incident pleased, it did not heal—for afterwards Dag continued to be drawn to precipitating disasters he knew would enrage others. His "accidental" dumping of radioactive waste into Claire's bungalow, seems by design. And Claire ends up supplying him what he may have been looking for when he'd precipitated similar upsets in the past—rejection, but rejection which could be assuaged through his own efforts: Dag allows Claire some revenge by allowing her and Tobias to spoil his bed, he and Andy "sweep, sweep, sweep" (84) all the dust up, and eventually things do return to normal.

Of course, things return to normal in part because Claire reorients her attention onto Tobias, onto the hold he has on her. Her mission moves her outside of her enclave; and the fact that she and Andy so enthusiastically rejoice or quickly reset after returning from engagements with outsiders in way of their personal evolution, helps make their sanctuary seem not just safe but authoritative—sturdy and strong. And

though it is built over a fault line, it *is* a safe place to return to—and because it is, Claire and Andy feel emboldened to engage and dispense with those outside its walls who were or are a source of distress. Claire travels to New York and rids herself of her interest in Tobias—who had been depicted as being adept in using her—by playing to his inclination to offend to secure excellent reason for leaving him behind for good. Andy travels “home” to Portland, to his parents, who offer both support *and* belittlement, and uses demonstrations of their inability to understand him as an excuse to conclude they would not and should not be a part of his future.

Ironically, like all other constituents of commercial society, Tobias and Andy’s parents are not so much caricatured as they are packaged, packaged to be ready-shipped out of Gen Xers’ lives.

Such detachments from familiar fixtures may assist these Gen Xers’ detachment from a much more faithful friend—their Palm Springs sanctuary. But even though it provided a safe haven, Andy and his friends do end up leaving it behind in pursuit of better. There is a sense that some of the stories they tell one another, in conjunction with happenings in their real lives, also help them prepare for such a move. We note that sometime after Claire tells her the Texlahoma story in which two sisters watch another of their sisters escape into space, Evlina successfully leaves Palm Springs for a better way of life. Upon learning of this, Andy and Dag feel just like the sisters in the Texlahoma story did—jealous, left-behind. But perhaps also a bit better prepared to see *themselves* leaving

the disappointing in pursuit of something preferable in the future.

Sanctuaries are desirable, but they’re not paradise—and this no doubt helps them better function as places to recuperate within. For while wounded and vulnerable, the last thing you want to do is make claim to something that’s sure to draw unwelcome notice. And the text shows it’s in essential agreement with Caliban’s conclusion that “the best way to escape [. . .] ire, / is to not seem too happy” (Browning, “Caliban Upon Setebos” 256-7)—not only do some of the stories told (such as Dag’s story of how a man followed up his suddenly feeling freed of a lifelong-held fear of sudden apocalypse by finding another fear to obsess over) evidence a need to follow the onset of sudden happiness by hurriedly finding justification for feeling miserable again, the text repeatedly suggests that standing out, having too much of what others similarly desire, invites catastrophe. We learn, for instance, that Tyler’s numerous infidelities invite an angry older woman’s pursuit, that Tyler’s mercenary companion’s gem-like blue eyes doom him, that Andy’s Americanness makes him subject to a crowd’s jealous eyes (and perhaps also to a Japanese executives’ sexual advancements), and that the Texlahoma sister who abandons hum-drum for true love is used by her (ostensible) lover, and dies.

Best be at your best before drawing upon oneself that kind of heat, and Andy, especially, appears to know this all too well. That is, the reason Andy describes his Palm Spring’s sanctuary as such a compromised place likely owes to his

need to convince himself that those who might take a closer look therein, wouldn't find much to interest them. Andy seeks camouflage, but no doubt about it, real treasure lurks behind his narrative veils. For instance, though possessions really aren't quite their thing, strip away their conjoined adjectives and Andy and his gang are left with bungalows, a Saab, and jobs, rather than "clean but disorganized little bungalow[s]" with "serviceable (and by no means stunning) furnished room[s] [, which require] [. . .] cheer[ing] up by inexpensive low-grade Navajo Indian blankets" (6), a "syphilitic Saab" (74), and "McJobs" (5). The adjectives tell the truer tale? Maybe not as much as you think: little bungalows can be quaint, syphilitic Saabs can be endearing, and McJobs seem sufficient to keep their current lifestyle going. But Gen Xers might well be pleased if such a consideration occurred to you, *especially* if they'd count you amongst the devouring plentitude.

They do leave their safe world behind them, perhaps prepared to pursue better—and perhaps also to attend more fairly to those they've used along the way. That is, though Andy shows outsiders as not just different from but clearly inferior to Gen Xers, he is sensitive and self-aware enough to know at some level what he is up to. Even if it is Coupland, and not Andy, who in the text's margins notes that members of one generation tend to characterize previous and subsequent ones as inferiors, Andy, who knows there are things about his own friends he ought to but is reluctant to explore (such as the implications of appreciating that his

friends' smiles always seem to give them the look of the fleeced), who can size up and assault his friends with a mean but acute estimation of their failings, who is aware of their tendency to narrate everything as "from hell," surely is aware of this need too. We note that he disposes of Tyler and Tobias in his narratives a little too neatly and a little too loudly. His written estimation of them could possibly both service current purposes as well as potential future ones: that is, when he's prepared himself to take in the world anew, they might serve as quick pointers to all he might be in mind to re-appraise.

Might he come to decide that most people—that is, not just Tyler and Tobias—are not best understood as slaves to commercial culture? Might he re-assess Brazilification as only "the latest thing," an enthusiasm, a madness which would pass? I would hope he would. But I'd settle for him becoming comfortable enough with real uncertainty that the pleasing certainty a vice-filled world can offer one, would have lost much of its appeal.

Works Cited

- Browning, Robert. "Caliban Upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island." 987-94. *The Norton Anthology of Literature*. Ed. M.H. Abrams. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1968. Print.
- Clare, John. *The Modern Satiric Grotesque: And Its Traditions*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991. Print.

PATRICK MCEVOY-HALSTON

Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. New York: St. Martin's, 1991. Print.

Knight, Charles A. *The Literature of Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick McEvoy-Halston is an American-Canadian author who currently resides in Toronto, Canada.

<http://patrickjustincasesite.blogspot.ca>

Proof